



**CAN IPL CREATE
NEW IDENTITIES?**

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

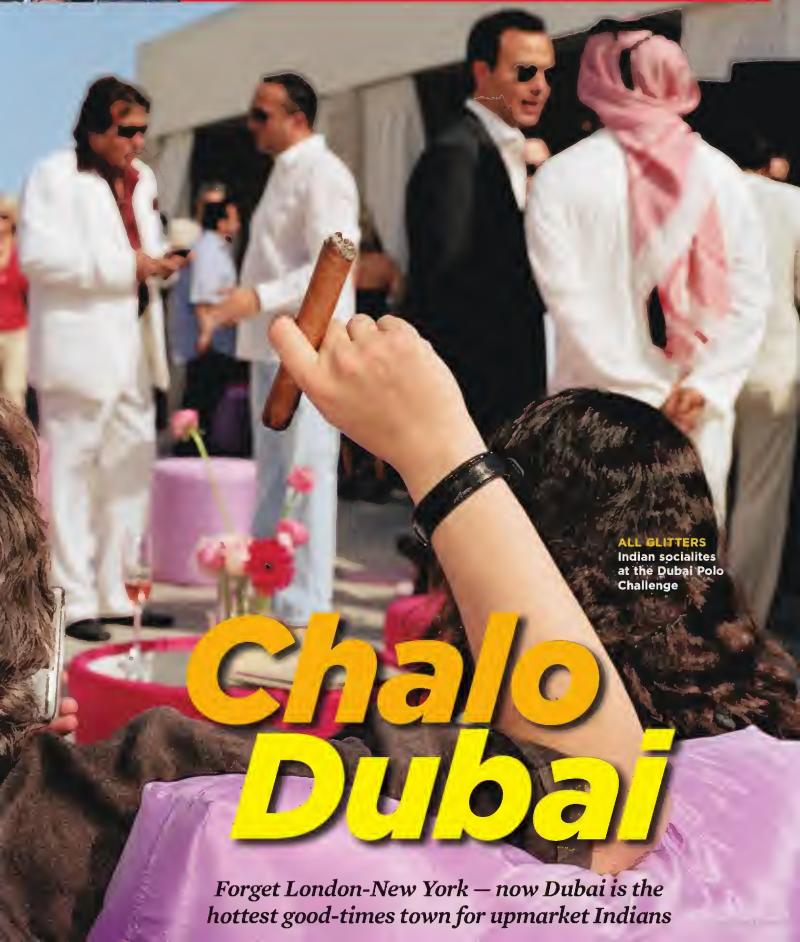
Rs 20

April 29-May 5, 2008

**NITISH KUMAR
LALOO'S ANTITHESIS**

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OUTLOOK



ALL GLITTERS
Indian socialites
at the Dubai Polo
Challenge

Chalo Dubai

*Forget London-New York — now Dubai is the
hottest good-times town for upmarket Indians*

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NITISH KUMAR chief minister, Bihar

"Don't listen to those who say I'm too bureaucratic. I'm making bureaucrats come among the public and answer."



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Chalo Dubai

Forget London, New York. Upmarket Indians are now heading for Dubai when they want to have a rockin' good time. What woos them to this once-staid emirate? An aside on its real estate boom. Plus, a column by Achal Prabhala.

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Cover Design: Bishwadeep Moitra; Photograph: Martin Parr / Magnum Photos

OUTLOOK MONEY
 HOW TO NAVIGATE
 SLOWING GROWTH
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 HOT INFLATION

NOW ON STANDS



The Fast and the Furious

In contrast to the assertion in your cover story (*Change For A Twenty?*, Apr 21), I feel Twenty20 will actually rejuvenate Test cricket. Its entirely closed, structured format will over time help people appreciate the classic ebb and flow and play of variables in the longer game. If anything can destroy Tests, it is Pataudi's suggestion of over limits. As for TV revenue, I'm sure millions will prefer the highlights of a well-fought Test, irrespective of result, than a domestic T20. If anything deserves to die, it's the overly predictable '50-50'.
AVINANDAN D., ON E-MAIL

Your story affords a comprehensive view of the changing concept and practice of cricket. Indian cricketers being paid crores is not new, but the spectacle of such huge monies being drawn—magnet-like—by a sport where there was already a concentration of it must be demoralising for cash-starved fields like hockey. However, I cannot see why former cricketers are sceptical towards T20. True, it poses a threat to the medieval charms of Tests, but its up is that it's less time-consuming, more exciting, and filled with dollops of entertainment: all considered, a perfect spectacle.
SUNNY AKHOURI, RANCHI

This glorified gulli-danda will be the last nail in the coffin of cricket. Its downfall started the day players started being sold like cattle. We've lost the game as it was played in the era of Kapil and Imran. This gaggle of industrialists and film stars makes for a cheerless funeral.
JATINDER, VANCOUVER

T20 can be a boon for the man living a fast life, with scarce time for leisure and entertainment. But a Twenty20 match would not reflect the individual skill and character of players to a degree apparent in Tests and ODIs. It's a hit-and-run kind of a situation, a hell-for-leather scramble for goods.
M.K. DADRWAL, JAIPUR

With the entry of cheerleaders in cricket, we no longer will be disappointed in the lack of footwork in a batsman...the movement of those shapely legs beyond the long boundary will suffice. Batsmen may run themselves out, but the girls won't run out of tricks to delight us. I can foresee the triumphant return of all those old puns: the delicate glance towards fine leg and the rest of it.
S.R. DEVAPRAKASH, TUMKUR

Vinoo Mankad, Vijay Hazare and Lala Amarnath played the same game for national pride and little more besides. Now, cricket is only a business where players are auctioned.
ROSHAN AGRAWAL, SAMBALPUR

More than the change in format, it's the crass commercialisation of the game that rankles. Players are also likely to be enamoured by the easy money. Playing cricket for the sheer love of the game has surely passed into history.
P.P. THAMPY, THIRUVALLA, KERALA

With T20 and cheerleaders, the Americanisation of cricket seems complete. And what bet-

ter venue to start off the whole show than Bangalore, a city associated with jobs being out-sourced from the US. Some old-timers can cry hoarse over the skin show by the Washington Redskins, but American-style cricket is here to stay.
B.P. CHATERJI, BOMBAY

I wonder if the corporates tactically erred on the side of excess—what with 44 matches in 59 days. The public cannot be fooled all the time. I remember some festival matches being played in the '60s and '70s, but at least they were for some cause. The present tamasha has the sole purpose of making a quick buck. We have seen how successful the ICL matches were. There was hardly anything competitive about them.
B. PHANI BABU, PUNE

It was a shock to see *Outlook* describe IPL as tamasha cricket. The game with the richest governing body and the largest following in India was never very rewarding for the players themselves. Now, thanks to Lalit Modi's smart efforts, they are getting what they deserve.
SANJAY RANADE, PUNE

There is one aspect of IPL that you haven't noticed. Beyond anything, IPL is promoting extreme regionalism in our country. The question is, India being a multicultural, multiethnic society, can it afford to foster such parochialism?
SUMEET TREHAN, CHANDIGARH

Change is natural, and it was but inevitable—and, dare I say, desirable—that it would come to cricket. Not everyone has the time to watch entire Test matches, or even ODIs. It was needed to make cricket more popular in other parts of the world too. Twenty20 will also give a chance to domestic players, who might not ever play for India, to prove themselves. They can now earn some dec-

ent money, and compete with international stars. And, compared to European soccer, the money involved isn't that big.

DHARMENDRA, SIKAR

The blend of 'total marketing' and uncountable crores will ensure IPL's success. Unlike the ICL, which doesn't have too much stardom and money to back it, the IPL is comfortably placed. That filmwallahs have invested in the venture goes to show how India's two sources of mass entertainment are natural allies. Indeed, this symbiotic relationship is a force multiplier for both—give off a bit of stardom, and get a surefire hit (a rare thing in Bollywood) in return. Kerry Packer would have been so proud that his then-revolutionary dalliances with the game have evolved so.

ANOO H., MYSORE

The game that Bernard Shaw defined as one 'ten fools play and 1,000 fools watch' is now being globalised through the market economy. And everything carries a price: players, clubs, cheer girls...

GEORGE OLIVERA, MYSORE

When most other publications are busy cashing in on the opportunity through advertising, *Outlook* takes a candid look at IPL. A welcome reality check. The overdose of cricket—abbreviated or not—will not only spoil the game, but our thinking and interest in it as well.

SATYENDER SINGH DHULLI, DELHI

Here's my little ditty on the theme:

*The game of Twenty20
Has thrills aplenty
Bowling and batting
Like flies and wanton swatting
The ball, white
Gives the red a fright.
With a huge cash flow
Test cricket takes a blow.
RIP lovely, stately, cricket
T20 is a one-way ticket.*

SHANMUGAM MUDALIAR, PUNE

Dynasty Dynamics

By declining a ministerial post, Rahul Gandhi has shown his political maturity and foresight (*Freshmen Parade*, Apr 21). His self-willed engagement in organisational duties will pay the Congress dividends in the long run. His visits to villages will give the Congress a new connect with the 'real' India. He'd be the best bet for a party that's crying for a youthful, dynamic leader.

MANOJ PARASHAR, NOIDA

Inducting two junior ministers hardly indicates a generational shift in the Congress mindset. After all, it's the sons of the party's old guard who have got berths in the ministry. If anything, it only shows that nothing has really changed in the party.

DHIRENDER SINGH, CHENNAI

Actor Par Excellence



Aamir Khan represents a perfect case of confused duplicity—caught between his financial commitment and desire to be seen as a thinking man (*Run, But You Can't Hide on Doublespeak Avenue*, Apr 21). Most of the times, he picks up the 'right cause' on the eve of some film release or the other. He has now shown his incapability to take an honest stand when it matters. It's time this actor removed his mask.

ARVIND KUMAR, HYDERABAD

Wouldn't all those celebrities who pulled out of the torch run have sung a different tune had the Olympics been held in a country like the US or Israel? Tibetans may be subjugated by China, but at least they get

a chance to survive on earth. But see what's happening in Iraq or Palestine. It's virtual genocide. Yet, had the 2008 games been held in, say, Texas or Tel Aviv, all these rich and the famous would have jostled among themselves to carry the Olympic flame. This, I feel, is the real doublespeak.

SANDEEP GHIYA, MUMBAI

Aamir had once said he won't attend any film awards. Even so, he tried every trick to promote *Lagaan*, once his film was shortlisted for the Oscars.

R. RAJEEV, DELHI

Aamir had spoken for the NBA, for the Narmada dam oustees. Doesn't he know Tibetans are displaced too?

DEVENDRA PATEL, AHMEDABAD

Hired Ideas

I wonder how anybody can judge a 'decline' in the writing quality of someone no less than Salman Rushdie by quoting generously from his critics (*Sir Talk-a-Lot*, Apr 21). What do you aim to achieve by publishing this 'secondary' review? While I do agree that a couple of Rushdie's previous works like *Shalimar the Crown* and *Fury* were boring, his latest novel is by far the most entertaining. I dare say *The Enchantress of Florence* is better than *Midnight's Children*. With so many inside jokes on the West, Islam and Indian culture, it's vintage Rushdie again. It has my vote for the Booker this year.

REEM SAIED, CHENNAI

Darkened Detail

Your grim portrayal of elderly Indian parents in alien lands seems a trifle exaggerated (*Fallen Pieces of Silver*, Apr 21). I have had the opportunity to stay and interact with several NRI families in the US and elsewhere. The elderly parents there, far from expecting 'tra-

ditional conduct' from their westernised daughter-in-law, are aware of the rigours of their busy office schedule—added to which are family responsibilities like picking up children on their return home after work. Perhaps what ails most NRI parents is the lonely life—autumn days spent out-



side close-knit neighbourhoods and family. A handful of Indian television channels and the soaps they air can hardly be a substitute for the routine saas-bahu gossip that had energised their youthful days.

V. NATARAJAN, LUCKNOW

Trace of a Traitor

How dare Prem Shankar Jha argue that Afzal Guru be pardoned (*Point A to Point A is the Costliest Journey*, Apr 21). I knew *Outlook* was a Congress mouthpiece, but this is sycophancy at its worst.

VENKAT MAHALINGAM, SECUNDERABAD

Glib Counsel

James L. Connaughton says the US can't afford to wait for India to make emission cuts (*Interview*, Apr 21). But why hasn't his boss, George Bush, signed the Kyoto Treaty? They secure a free pass, and give lectures to India and China!

S. ARVIND, ROCHESTER, US

Schism in the Cadre

It's true the IAS cadre has got more than its worth in the Pay Commission (*The Bureau Autocrats*, Apr 21). Remember, the forest officer's job involves a lot of tour, and bigger risk of

attack from mafias, with their field work focusing on forest revenue, interaction with tribals and protection of ecology. Also, if vacancies are fewer, so they have to be very brainy. **ABHISHEK PRAKASH, ON E-MAIL**



Politicians and bureaucrats have always had a symbiotic relationship—not because of any mutual love but because of a common goal: to swindle the country. No wonder, few scams see the light of day. **M.A. RAIPET, SECUNDERABAD**

Nay, Nay, Naipaul

Reading his books, I used to wonder how bad V.S. Naipaul can be as a person (Books, Apr 21). Now we know it—he has himself told you and me. **BINDU TANDON, MUMBAI**

Little surprise Naipaul's works are at best above average. **K. SETHUMADHAVAN, GURGAON**

Another piece on Naipaul! This time, you've gone so far as to publish a paean to even the writer's biographer! **DARSHANA WORAH, MUMBAI**

The *Outlook* reader is lately caught between Naipaul's constipation of ideas and Salman Rushdie's diarrhoea of words. One welcome relief, though: Arundhati Roy's abstinence from literary exertions. **R.V. IYENGAR, HYDERABAD**

The Good Old Man

Finally, *Outlook* carries an honest piece on L.K. Advani ("I was prepared to take the risk", Apr 14). No malicious bid to demoralise him—this time. **VIVEK GUMASTE, NEW YORK**

Out, Ancien Regime!

Reading Vinod Mehta's *Delhi Diary* (Apr 21), I concluded that if India needs a youth revolution to reverse the fraud by which old fogeys hang on to power while throwing crumbs to the young, so be it. The obvious need is for the young to assert themselves, seize power and either throw the oldies out or at best throw them a few stale crumbs. There is no point in lamenting the situation. We need real, dynamic and relentless young turks, not just any youngster, to change the system, radically.

SOM BENEGAL, ON E-MAIL

Not just the young, Mr Mehta. More importantly, we need an able man at the helm. He has to be someone who has the conviction to stand up for constructive ideas and not just play safe to retain power.

VIJAYENDER C., BANGALORE

By suggesting the need for a prime minister who should be around 44 years of age, Vinod Mehta has shown himself to be a shameless sycophant of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

PRAVIN DESAI,

KILLA PARDI, GUJARAT

Mr Mehta, what about the young people who do not have a Gandhi or Pilot as their last name? We need a system that encourages youth from all backgrounds in politics and not just those who are there because of their fathers.

RAVI SHEKHAR PANDEY, NEW DELHI

The problems endemic to the Indian subcontinent can be sorted out only through Communist rule. The sooner the majority of the Indian population realises this, the better it will be for all concerned. The Communist rule in West

Bengal has been without the sort of endemic corruption that is widespread in states ruled by other political parties. The BJP thrives on inciting hatred and demolishing places of worship of minorities while the Congress, though ostensibly secular, covertly agrees to and takes delight in what the BJP does in the name of nationalism.

VIVEK CHATTERJEE, CALCUTTA

Vinod's wish to see Jitin Prasad as foreign minister can be taken further. How about Rahul Gandhi as home minister? If he's successful, there will be no snide remarks about his becoming the PM after the next election.

MANI AIYER, CHENNAI



For once I am in complete agreement with Mr Mehta. Even a kindergarten kid would do better than the rogue Das-munshi, Chidambarams, Renuka Chowdhurys or Arjun Singhs who seem hell-bent on destroying this country.

P.C. JOSEPH, BANGALORE

Name-dropping an art? Perhaps. But, I'm afraid, you have a long way to go before mastering it, Mr Mehta.

PRABHU KUMAR, VADODARA

In a *Big Boy's Bad Books?* Never. Send those books to us, Mr Mehta, your readers. We would for sure give you an honest review free from the

baggage of prejudices and biases that established writers and professional reviewers carry along with them. At least we'd be spared boring reviews of equally boring books!

AMEET BHUVAN, BHUBANESHWAR

Your conundrum is an interesting one, Mr Mehta. How about making it akin to a blind date? Do not reveal the identity of the author to potential reviewers? I think this would produce some very unbiased reviews.

PROTEEP MALIK, BANGALORE

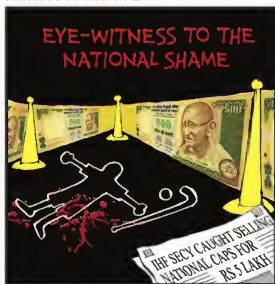
What you spell out in your *Delhi Diary* comes true in the two reviews you have carried in *Outlook*—of Salman Rushdie's *Enchantress of Florence* and Patrick French's biography of V.S. Naipaul. Sunil Khilnani has done a very insipid job of reviewing French's effort. Sanjay Suri on the other hand has been pretty vocal in his criticism of Rushdie's *Enchantress*. While the former is perhaps apprehensive that Naipaul may pay him back in the same coin, Sanjay Suri should have no such fear as I doubt if he is ever going to write a book!

RAJIV CHOPRA, JAMMU

I sympathise with Vinod Mehta for not being in the charmed circle of L.K. Advani. This is a peculiar problem with men like the BJP leader: they can be weak in their convictions when sentimentality overtakes them. What Mr Mehta tends to forget is that fascists never drop their agenda; they defer it tactically. I doubt if *My Life* will ever see a second edition, leave aside finding a place in the pantheon of great autobiographies. Besides the poverty of language, it has also evidently erred in the historicity of information.

RAJENDRA CHOPRA, FARIDABAD

MIRROR IMAGE



by Sandeep Adhwaray

CROSSINGS

ELECTED

FERNANDO LUGO, 56-year-old ex-RC priest, as the new Paraguay prez. The centre-left alliance of the 'Bishop of the Poor' ends 60 years of Colorado Party rule.



AWARDED

The Global Health Council's Jonathan Mann prize to **BINAYAK SEN**, the doctor-activist in jail in Chhattisgarh for 'Maoist' links. Can he be released for the Washington ceremony?



SWAP BID

Pakistan has released a major pro-Taliban leader and 30 others in a bid to secure release of their **AFGHANISTAN ENVOY TARIQ AZIZUDDIN**. The ambassador was abducted in February.



BIG ISLE

AUSTRALIA has bulged its continental shelf by a million sq miles. A UN commission ruling gives it seabed rights but no sway over shipping, fishing etc.



NO MASALA

'Indian' restaurants in the UK are in protest mode against new immigration rules which says no recruiting chefs from the subcontinent. A few curry houses have shut.



BULL'S EYE

Rajinder Puri

ARJUN SINGH SAID THAT MAKING RAHUL GANDHI THE PM WOULD be a good idea. Many Congress leaders vied with each other to echo that opinion. Unexpectedly, Soniaji summoned Arjun Singh to reprimand him. She reminded him that Dr Manmohan Singh was still PM. Lobbying for Rahul sent a wrong signal. "Oops!" said Arjun Singh. "I forgot Manmohan Singh was PM!"

Next day the Congress spokesman put things on record. He sternly said the Congress was committed to the highest democratic norms and did not encourage sycophancy. He clarified that spontaneous outbursts of emotion could not of course be called sycophancy.

Congressmen are taking this advice very seriously. I ran into one Congress leader who admonished critics for harping on the Dynasty. "There is no such thing in our party," he declared. "All of us express our own honest opinions!"

"Was Arjun Singh expressing his honest opinion?" "Of course!"

"Then why did Soniaji pull him up?"

"She did not want other leaders to parrot Arjun Singh. She welcomes only spontaneous expressions of emotion."

"Was Arjun Singh spontaneous?"

"Of course, he is spontaneous and honest!"

"Hmmm! So he is not a sycophant?"

"Are you crazy? Arjun Singh is the bravest rebel in the party!"

"Really! How is that?"

"Despite Soniaji's reprimand Arjun Singh is sticking to his guns! He continues to say Rahul is best for the PM's post regardless of how much Rahul's mother may restrain him!"

"Pranab Mukherjee supported Rahul's candidature much after Arjun Singh spoke. Was that spontaneous?" a reporter suddenly popped the question.

"He spontaneously burst into emotion."

"Tell me, is there anybody in the Congress party who is willing to say that Rahul should not become PM in 2009?"

"Of course! What do you take us for? We are not all yes men. We have divergent views. There are many who think Rahul should not be PM in 2009."

"Name one," I challenged.

"Take me," he said. "I don't think Rahul should become PM in 2009!" "Really? Why not?"

"I believe he should be deputy PM! Soniaji must be made PM! Only then should Rahul succeed her."

"Oh! And what about Priyanka?"

"No politics for her," he said firmly. "She should only be the President. Did you see how she visited Rajivji's assassin? Just like Mother Teresa!" ■



(Puri can be reached at rajinderpuri2000@yahoo.com)

"If the Twenty20 format is compared with fashion, I'd like to name it Bikini Cricket." —Ex-Indian Captain Rahul 'The Wall' Dravid

Who'll Have A Cow?

ASHOK KHENY, THE MAN building the multi-crore Bangalore-Mysore expressway, has been known for his run-ins with Deve Gowda & sons. In fact, the Gowdas have gone to the courts



many times over to get the project scuttled. But now, with assembly polls round the corner, it's time to settle scores. The Nandi Infrastructure CEO is a BJP sympathiser and has been addressing rallies where he pleads with the people to "vote right", (read vote out the Gowdas). The latest from the Kheny stable: he'll distribute cows to poor widows across the state. The cow, after all, symbolises the BJP's ideological moorings (and sort of reminds one of the "humble farmer" too). Better watch it, the EC is keeping tabs on the tamasha. ■

When, Starring...

CHIRANJEEVI'S TRYST with politics is going through a very confusing phase. The Telugu superstar, on the lookout for the perfect "launch vehicle", has had meetings with every political

Yours Sincerely

THERE'S MORE NEWS FROM VELLORE JAIL following Priyanka Gandhi's secret meeting with Nalini last month. It's now learnt that the latter's husband, Murugan, and an associate named Santhan—both on death row in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case—have written to Priyanka and Sonia lavishing praise on the two. Santhan has even compared Priyanka to grandmother Indira Gandhi, who "respected the Tamils". Vellore's other inmates too felt "honoured" by Priyanka's visitation. Murugan's missive to Sonia (at whose behest Nalini's death sentence was commuted to a life term) thanked her for the love and "sense of peace" she exuded. One good all this adulatory pen-pushing has done is it's squashed rumours of a split between the couple over Nalini's meeting. If the drama continues, Tamil land's racy little mags are sure to jump in wanting to serialise it. Jail officials, in fact, have even thought up a title, 'Letters from Vellore Prison'. ■



Cartoons by SANDEEP ADHWARYU

party, from the TDP to the Congress. Last week, close friend and political advisor Dr Puchalapalli Mitra even met up with CPI(M) state secretary B.V. Raghavulu, raising several eyebrows. Chiru and the Commies? Sources say Chiranjeevi has

asked Left leaders to put off alignments till after the bypolls in May after which his party would be launched. Meanwhile, the star has sought the help of some senior journo to train him

in handling the media apart from improving his English. Even the fans are training to fine-tune their oratory skills. Fingers crossed, everything's set for Chiru's coming-out party. Now if only he'd make up his mind. ■



Too Big A Cross

KERALA'S EDUCATION minister M.A. Baby has kicked up a row of sorts with his recent remark, "If Jesus Christ was alive, he'd be a member of the CPI(M) politburo." The believers are readying the stakes. ■

VICIOUS TRIANGLES

Before the big battle, inner skirmishes reshape the big players



Keep It sane S.M. Krishna pacifies an aggrieved Congress supporter in Bangalore

by Sugata Srinivasaraju

BEFORE the ticket allotment drama shifted to Delhi last week, the Congress party in Karnataka held marathon meetings to shortlist candidates for the 224 assembly constituencies going to the polls next month. Senior central leaders and local bigwigs argued ceaselessly, trying to put together a list of 'winnable' candidates. But one person conspicuous by his minimal involvement (at times even by his absence) was the man the high command had specifically dispatched to Karnataka, S.M. Krishna. One top Congress leader told *Outlook*: "I was watching Krishna for two days.

The first day he came in and stayed for about 30 minutes... when we spent more than 10 hours discussing tickets. The next day he didn't even put in an appearance."

What went wrong? What happened to all the hype surrounding Krishna's re-entry into state politics? There was

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2004

PARTY	SEATS
BJP:	79
INC :	65
JD(S):	58
JD(U):	5
BSP:	0
OTHERS:	17
TOTAL SEATS:	224



ARJAN SINGH

much expectation that he would contest the polls either from Maddur in Mandya district or from one of the many Bangalore constituencies. That hasn't happened. The last day for fil-

ODDS AND EVENS

- The S.M. Krishna magic yet to work for the Congress. Ticket distribution dominated by M. Kharge, Dharam Singh and Siddaramaiah.
- BJP hit by rift between Ananth Kumar, Yediyurappa. Along with the Bellary lobby, the party is being pulled in three different directions.
- The secular vote is split, pundits predict a hung assembly. If so, Deve Gowda will play kingmaker, again.

Yediyurappa (centre) with Ananth Kumar (right), state BJP chief Sadanand Gowda



ing nominations for these constituencies was April 23.

If the Krishna-in-Karnataka plan has not panned out for the Congress, all is not well in the BJP camp either. Party insiders worry about the growing differences between senior leaders B.S. Yediyurappa and H.N. Ananth Kumar. Yediyurappa has kept control of the seat allotment process and, like Krishna in the Congress, Ananth Kumar looks a little lost in the process. The Bellary lobby, the Yediyurappa lobby and the Ananth Kumar lobby seem to be pulling in three different directions. But the party has a positive spin for this. Ganesh Karnik, MLC, says, "There are more people eager to contest on a BJP ticket now...they see us coming to power this time."

With a three-phase election, from May 10-22, no one is making pointed predictions. But across party lines, the threat of a hung verdict looms large. Reason: too many claimants for the 'secular vote' and too little depth in the BJP (vis-a-vis winnable candidates in all seats). The latter, in fact, has so far announced only 171 candidates. There are rumours that the BSP may swing with the BJP in some seats. As far as the 'secular vote' is concerned, there is the SP, JD(s) and also the BSP to compete with the Congress. It is reliably learnt that the JD(s) is focusing on about 60 seats and is 'confident' of getting 30. The Congress wants to consolidate the 'secular vote' by tying up with the SP, but its Karnataka leader S. Bangarap-

pa is as temperamental as ever.

As of now, the state Congress is firmly in the grip of PCC president Mallikarjuna Kharge, and to an extent ex-CM Dharam Singh. In the tickets distributed so far too, their influence is evident. The talk these days is that if the party secures a simple majority, then it's Kharge who will be CM and not Krishna. In the event of a hung assembly, the only leader who appears acceptable is Dharam Singh.

Ex-deputy CM and Kuruba leader Siddaramaiah also appears prominent though for some he's only focused on getting tickets to people who crossed over with him from the JD(s). The Congress expects Siddaramaiah to deliver the Kuruba votes, the third largest community in the state, and also influence the other backward classes. The high command perhaps thought that Krishna would get the middle-class urban votes as well as arrest the slide in the Vokkaliga-dominant old Mysore region.

But there has been so much of dissension in the region that the BJP, which never had a big presence here till now, has been able to woo away Congress rebels. A case in point is Madhu Gowda, son of Made Gowda, ex-Congress MP from

Mandya. He's now contesting the Madur seat, Krishna's former constituency, on a BJP ticket. "If Krishna had a decisive role, he'd have ensured the Congress did not mess up with the ticket distribution on his home turf," feel party workers.

Krishna's low profile is also explained in two other ways. A former legislator says: "There may be a fear in the party that if Krishna is projected over Kharge, the Dalit votes may drift to the BSP." The other argument is that since there is a perception that it'll be a hung verdict, projecting Krishna as CM is a futile exercise since he would anyway not be acceptable to a coalition partner—which by default is assumed to be the JD(s).

But Krishna loyalists feel it's a little far-fetched to say that Dalit votes will slide if Kharge is not given prominence. They point out that the BSP is in the fray in all 224 constituencies, so the Dalit vote will get split anyway. "Also, the Dalit vote is not homogeneous, the BSP is likely to attract the votes of the Madiga community among SCs, who were traditionally with the Congress." The Congress does not have any prominent Madiga leader.

Although campaigning will be frenetic in the next few weeks, many leaders are also gearing up for what will be hectic post-poll activity. If the outcome is a hung house, then both the BJP and the Congress will have to woo Deve Gowda. Will it then be a repeat of 2004? The humble farmer has already declared that "no national party can come to power without JD(s) support". ■

COMPETITION FOR THE secular vote is stiff, and BSP will make a serious play for the Dalits.



HALL AT GURUDWARA HAZOOR SAHIB, NANDED



MODEL FOR THE RENOVATED HALL

HAVE YOU THE EYES FOR IT?

Sikhism's heritage is being pulverised by a blend of ignorance, arrogance, new money

by Chander Suta Dogra

IN the dead of the night, sometime in October last year, police surrounded the historic baradari at Gurudwara Hazoor Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra, built during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign. Under their watchful eye, the once-magnificent structure was razed to the ground, even as conservationists who had

drawn up detailed plans to restore it were pleading with the gurudwara management to preserve the 150-year-old building. It was 300 years ago, in October 1708, that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh guru, bestowed the guardianship of the faith on the Guru Granth

Sahib at this very spot. Since then, Hazoor Sahib has been revered as one of the four takhts of Sikhism.

What happened at Nanded in October and before that in January 2007, when another historic structure in the complex, the Ramgarhia Bunga, was simi-

HERITAGE MAUL

In the name of kar seva, historic Sikh structures are being demolished:

- Part of the 150-year old Gurudwara Hazoor Sahib in Nanded was razed
- The 500-year-old home of Bebe Nanaki (elder sister of Guru Nanak) also met the same fate
- Homes of Sikh gurus Amar Dass and Ram Dass in Amritsar were razed
- According to INTACH 90 per cent of all ancient Sikh buildings in Punjab have been demolished

larly demolished, leading to rioting by local Sikhs and police firing, has become a recurrent story with Sikh historic monuments across the country. In the face of sharp criticism by conservationists and Sikh intellectuals in Punjab and elsewhere, as well as vigorous online campaigns spearheaded by expatriate Sikhs to preserve their heritage, the keepers of these monuments have brazenly continued their wanton depredation. Gurmeet Rai, director of INTACH's Cultural Resource Conservation Initiative (CRCI), who has restored several ancient Sikh historical buildings in Punjab, says, "I would say 90 per cent of Sikh heritage monuments have been destroyed in Punjab in the name of renovation and kar seva." Kar seva is a unique institution in Sikhism, wherein the community collects funds or volunteers its labour to repair or build religious structures, gen-

erally gurudwaras. Why and how did things come to this pass?

"Though kar seva babas had been renovating gurudwaras ever since anyone can remember, it was after Operation Bluestar, when the Sikh community donated generously for the massive rebuilding of the Golden Temple premises, that 'babas' began to appreciate the money-making opportunities such rebuilding threw up. The trend then spread across Punjab and in the last two decades, old heritage structures began to be demolished and replaced by garish, opulent marble gurudwaras", says H.S. Dilgeer Singh, a Sikh historian. Adds Rai, "These pseudo-babas are armed with so much money but they spend it foolishly on rebuilding instead of restoration, because they are absolutely ignorant about the historical value of these old monuments. Somewhere along the line, the original, unpretentious Sikh architecture has begun to be perceived as something to be ashamed of. Our Gurus were simple, down-to-earth men of the soil, and their buildings reflect the simplicity and harmony which Sikhism is all about."

It was this very simplicity of the Ramgarhia Bunga and the Baradari at Nanded which brought about their destruction. Dr P.S. Pasricha, present chairman of the Hazoor Sahib Gurudwara Board and former director-general of police, Maharashtra, told *Outlook*, "The Baradari was a dilapidated structure which was coming in the way of the huge development plans currently being executed for the celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the guruship of the Guru Granth Sahib at Nanded this year. As far as I am aware, it had no historical value. As for the Ramgarhia Bunga, it was an old room with two tin trunks in it. We have now given 3,000 sq ft of land at another place to the Ramgarhias to construct a new 31-room sarai with a museum. We are making the place an international pilgrimage destination. Besides the Rs 125 crore which the board is spending on the gurudwara project, the town of Nanded too is getting a facelift, for which the Planning Commission has earmarked Rs 1,500 crore."



The Ramgarhia Bunga, pulled down in Jan 2007

But what Pasricha and his cohorts do not talk about is the painstakingly elaborate restoration plans made by Sharad Chalikwar, a consultant engineer with the board and Kiran Kalamdani, a restoration architect from Pune once associated with the project. "I spent two years drawing up the plan for the Baradari, but was forced to dissociate myself from the project when it was demolished despite our pleas. They are bulldozing their own heritage," says Chalikwar. Adds Kalamdani, who was originally appointed to conserve the Baradari, "We were thrown out along with the demolition of these monuments. All that matters to them is the desire to make grand structures." Both the Baradari and the Bunga were built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The destruction at Nanded is particularly unfortunate because it was done under the supervision of a top police officer and not some ignorant kar seva baba.

Back home in Punjab, the list of Sikh

heritage structures which have fallen at the hands of overzealous babas is growing too. Dr Gurtej Singh, a Sikh scholar, lays the blame at the door of the Sikh leadership of recent times. "Whether it is the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee or the Akal Takht or even the political Akali Dal which draws its strength from the former two, there is no appreciation for our heritage. Scholars like us do not matter in the scheme of things, because we obstruct their commercial aspirations. The SGRC patronises these babas and they do not realise that they are converting history into mythology by destroying historical evidence." Take the case of the 500-year-old house of Bebe Nanki (elder sister of Guru Nanak) in Sultanpur Lodi. A few years ago, it was bought up by one Baba Jagtar Singh and was

demolished in 2003. A sparkling white marble building now stands in its place. The old homes of two Sikh gurus, Amar Das and Ram Dass, which stood in Amritsar till a few years ago, were pulled down and shining new gurudwaras erected in their place. The same fate has befallen Gurudwara Jyoti Swarup at Sirhind where the two sons of Guru Gobind Singh were cremated, and Shahid Ganj near Mani Sahib Hall near Amritsar, the site of the mass cremation of Sikh martyrs who fought against Ahmed Shah Abdali. The peeling, faded frescoes at Baba Atal Gurudwara in Amritsar and at Baba Bakala in Gurdaspur were removed and replaced by common ceramic tiles, much to the anguish of educated Sikhs. Why, even the Golden Temple at Amritsar was not spared—frescoes in its Darshani Deori were whitewashed some years ago and the 'renovation' was stopped only when the matter was raised in the local media.

But who shall bell the cat? Or is it too late already to launch a strong protest? If community leaders are apathetic to the obliteration of their spiritual heritage being done with the active collusion of religious leaders, is there hope for Sikhism's architectural heritage, much of which has already fallen prey to insensitivity and greed? ■

**PSEUDO BABAS FLUSH
WITH money, ignorant
of heritage, fill the land
with marble edifices.**



The Old Confidence Trick

Congress' pat on the back for the PM revealed ungainly fissures

JAYANTHI Natarajan's declaration last week that "there is no vacancy for the post of prime minister", and that "the UPA government, the prime minister and his team have put in a magnificent record of performance-oriented achievement" may have been intended to halt the groundswell in the Congress party to name Rahul Gandhi as the next prime minister and reassert confidence in Manmohan Singh. But her words were not well-chosen and the timing of her declaration undid most of the good that it was intended to do. First, the mere reference to the prime ministership of India as 'a post' implies that there is someone superior to him in the hierarchy who has the authority to decide whether, and till when, he should occupy it. In a parliamentary democracy there is such a person, but it is the President of India. However, since the President is bound by the advice of his cabinet, and the cabinet is headed by the prime minister, it means the President can replace him only on the advice of the prime minister himself. That is called 'resignation' and as far we know Manmohan Singh had not yet resigned.

Any doubt that Ms Natarajan's choice of words may have been unfortunate was removed by the wording of her endorsement of the UPA's performance. Judgements upon the performance of a government presuppose the existence of a judge. Other than scholars (who consider themselves superior to all mere practitioners), and the people of India, in whom final sovereignty resides, the only other candidate for the position is the Congress president. Thus in the very act of endorsing Dr Singh, Ms Natarajan underlined his subordinate status to Sonia Gandhi.

What the Congress does not seem to have realised is that it did not only 'clarify' the relative status of two persons in this government, but two institutions of Indian democracy. What Ms Natarajan did was to leave no one in any doubt that the organisational wing of the party is superior to its parliamentary wing. This is usually found only in parties, like the Communists, that consider themselves vehicles for an ideology. The Congress is not, and has never been, an ideological vehicle. It has been a pragmatic party whose main aim has been, throughout, simply to capture power. Thus, the subordination of the parliamentary to the organisational wing will deprive it of any remaining capacity to govern.

The timing of Ms Natarajan's statement has further compounded the damage. Why did it take the Congress high command three days to react to Arjun Singh's suggestion? And why was the 'denial' read out by a middle-to-senior level party functionary? If Ms Sonia Gandhi really had faith in the PM, and if she had genuinely wished to prevent the undermining of his constitutional position, could she not have reacted immediately, and personally, to shut her party up?

The truth is that there are simply too many mistakes, too many 'clumsy' choices of words and too many unexplained silences for any serious observer to consider all this an embarrassment caused by a senior member of the party shooting off his mouth. Arjun Singh never does anything without premeditation. His goal was not to pre-empt the prime ministership for Rahul after the next election, because he knows that that issue can, and should, in his own interest, be raised only after the Congress has won the election. His

SORT



trial balloon was aimed at unseating Manmohan well before the next election.

The struggle by the Congress party organisation to rule India by proxy began in the early days of this government. The first erosion of Manmohan's position occurred when his initial assurances to former foreign minister Natwar Singh over the Volcker Commission's allegations were negated by carefully timed and selective information leaks to the media from within the Congress. But the most destructive impact of the intra-party struggle for power has been the scuttling of the Indo-US nuclear deal. At the Hindustan Times Conclave which followed shortly after Manmohan had asserted that the deal would go through irrespective of the Left's threats, Sonia lost no time in siding with the Left. She made sure that another 'senior' politician, Pranab Mukherjee, became the chairman of the coordination committee. Mukherjee has since then drawn out the negotiation process till the deal has virtually died.

Manmohan Singh is still the PM. But the Mukherjee-Arjun Singh duo has turned him into a lame-duck prime minister a year before the election. It is inconceivable that a party with so little to its credit can improve its chances at the hustings by descending further into paralysis.

History is full of ironies. In 1969 Indira Gandhi broke the Congress rather than allow the syndicate to run the country by proxy. It is her daughter-in-law, laying claim to her charisma, who has restored the primacy of the party organisation and its new syndicate. ■



BIHAR
NITISH KUMAR

A SHADE DIFFERENT

After the storm, the calm. A ravaged Bihar finds succour and sustenance in its CM, Nitish Kumar.

by Saba Naqvi Bhaumik in Patna

"I am a methodical man. If there is anything on earth I hate, it is genius. Your geniuses are all arrant asses."

—Edgar Allan Poe

NITISH Kumar is certainly a methodical man. When I go to meet the Bihar chief minister, he has just spent the entire day reading 3,000 written complaints from the people at his janata durbar. His ministers and bureaucrats sit around him in attendance. The sudden heat wave that has descended on the state capital doesn't seem to bother him; he keeps smiling at

many complainants and hastily dismisses the others. At the end of the exercise, he finds 1,700 complaints valid, and passes them on to his ministers and bureaucrats. And throughout, he has managed to keep both his cool, and his spectacles, on.

This is quite a leap of faith for Bihar. Its politicians are usually not in the habit of reading petitions from the public. They are more comfortable making speeches, posing for photographs with villagers and leaving the dirty work for their



The Quiet One Nitish Kumar at his official residence on Anne Marg

clerks and officials to do, who do not do it anyway. Nitish, in contrast, clearly has the patience for paperwork. His janata durbar is a remarkable feat of endurance. The CM has managed to introduce order in what can easily descend into chaos (every valid complaint is given a number), and inspired the belief that it is not impossible to seek—and get—redressal from the system.

If you ask economist Saibal Gupta, he tells you that, historically, Bihar was never a functioning state. Even before Independence, it had the most organised zamindari system and the lowest per capita expenditure on health, education and other public investments. Politicians in Bihar traditionally followed the route of forging social coalitions, seeking caste support and riding the crest of the state's many social justice or land reform agitations. Social upheaval or transformation has been

seen as the key to change in Bihar; not "vikas" or development schemes.

But ever since he came to power, the government has begun preparing economic surveys (written by nationally known economists)—the first time ever in Bihar's history. The second survey published in March this year duly notes that the state has the lowest per capita income of Rs 5,772, only a quarter of the national average of Rs 22,946. "For the first time," says Gupta, "Nitish is giving the impression that he is trying to

GOVERNANCE: NITISH STYLE

The Bihar chief minister's functioning is markedly different from that of his predecessor, Laloo Yadav.

- Methodical, hands-on approach to administration. Understands nitty-gritty of development schemes.
- Arrives in the secretariat by 10 am and stays till late evening. Personally oversees pet projects and schemes.
- Holds durbars where he himself scrutinises public complaints and passes these on to the ministers and officials concerned.
- Has taken up improving law and order in the state as top priority.
- Many dons in jail after convictions by fast track courts. Thousands arrested under Arms Act.
- No Laloo-style flamboyance for the media. Is correct and dignified with the press.



'Please move around Patna in the night and see how safe you are'

Ever since he assumed the reins of power in Patna, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar has grown significantly in political stature and national importance. That hasn't affected his easy, laidback style, though. Despite a tightly-packed day addressing public complaints, dealing with the bureaucracy and handling his newly expanded cabinet, the Bihar CM found time for Outlook at his Anne Marg residence. Excerpts:

People say you are too bureaucratic compared to Laloo...

(Laughs) You should not listen to such people. I would say I am making the bureaucrats come before the public and address their problems. If they fail to attend my janata durbar, there is disciplinary action against them.

You and Laloo Yadav co-scripted the Mandal strategy jointly in Bihar. But he became the Mandal hero...

People have seen through Laloo. He used words very effectively and took advantage of the polarisation in society which he sharpened further. But ask the people what steps I've taken for the empowerment of most backward castes and the backward section among minorities...

Your critics accuse you of playing into the hands of Bhumihars.

You are joking. You know my politics. I don't want any one community to be a hate figure. We are including everyone, excluding no one. The old way of looking at Bihar must change.

You're talking about development. But power in Bihar is retained through social coalitions...

I would not be in politics without my social coalition. Laloo Yadav used it, and clever oratory, to pit castes against each other, community against community. That has ended. Everyone welcomes an attempt to make the government work after years of chaos.

The fast-track courts you have set up have sent many dons to jail, but some of them like Prabhunath Singh are still MPs of your party...

I'm no one's friend or enemy. The law will take its course in every case. I follow a raj dharma. You have come here for the first time after I came to power.

“**People have seen through Laloo. He used words effectively and took advantage of the polarisation in society.**”



Please move around Patna in the night and see how safe you are.

Your cabinet expansion has created a furore. Deputy CM Sushil Modi's stature is said to have diminished...

No one's stature has diminished. Some people talk rubbish. Everyone here is talking about Sushil Modi. But nationally many BJP leaders and workers see Narendra Modi as the future leader...

We do not interfere in the internal matters of the BJP. We have an alliance with them in Bihar on specific issues; all the contentious issues are excluded from our programme. We don't have an alliance in Gujarat. *Hamare yahaan to Sushil Modi hai* (we have Sushil Modi). **Some economists say that state governments have more funds today because the UPA's revenue collection is better?**

Economic growth took place because of NDA-initiated policies. All the growth will be nullified by the UPA government. I'm not just talking about food. Look at the rising prices of construction materials. It's not just Bihar, on the verge of taking off, that will face problems. Even developed states will be ruined. The entire country will pay the price of the UPA government's mismanagement. ■

build a state. It is a mammoth task, but he has tried to make a beginning.”

And it is by no means an easy beginning. Given the state he inherited Bihar in, the CM has a long way to go—that too on a path ridden with ridicule. First off the block is state BJP president Abdul Bari Siddiqui. “Nitish organised a three-day seminar on poverty indicators,” he said. “I told him it is a shame you don't recognise poverty. Lalooji knows that a man who does not get two square meals is poor. Do you need to attend a seminar to understand poverty?”

Laloo certainly wouldn't. Flamboyant rival to Nitish's calm, efficient demean-

nour, he would never sit through a seminar or examine public petitions. Chaos, he would say in the early years of his 15-year rule, helps loosen the grip of the upper castes. Development, he famously argued, would not help the poor; its benefits would be cornered by the landlords, the Bhumihars. A master in the art of political rhetoric and guile, Laloo used caste antagonisms and Muslim insecurities to remain in power even as Bihar slipped on every socio-economic indicator. Nitish, who had co-scripted the Mandal strategy with Laloo before breaking away 15 years ago, is now a wiser man. “You can't think about Bihar

in the traditional way,” he says. “Mandal did empower some castes. But we can't justify the breakdown of the system and all rule of law.”

And it is not as if Nitish is not forging social coalitions. He has been wooing the extremely backward castes systematically, and making a serious bid to win over Muslims, or at the very least, blunt any organised opposition to the JD(U)-BJP alliance. Syed Nizamuddin, the secretary general of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and head of Bihar's leading Islamic school, the Imarat-i-Sharia at Phulwari Sharif, was consulted regularly by Laloo and continues to be wooed by



Janata durbar, Patna Bureaucrats and officials processing complaints cleared by the CM

Nitish. He is quite blunt when he says, "Nitish is serious about winning over Muslims or he wouldn't have sent two backward caste Muslims to the Rajya Sabha besides many schemes for minorities." However, the extent of Muslim electoral support, he adds, will depend on his positioning vis-a-vis the BJP.

It helps that the BJP in Bihar operates on a caste basis and does not play overt communal politics. Even so, during the assembly polls in 2005, Nitish campaigned independently and avoided sharing the platform with BJP leaders. He continues to avoid attending too many NDA meetings and was the only CM to give L.K. Advani's book release a miss in Delhi. BJP leader and deputy CM Sushil Modi says: "He never interferes in our affairs and we know he comes from a different ideological stream. Even the Bihar BJP is supportive of his effort to woo Muslims. They make up a large chunk of society and can't be ignored. Besides, there are boundaries that separate the JD(U)-BJP though we are in an alliance."

Nitish is also trying to alter other political traits that have left such a mark on Bihar society. Patna residents are stunned at the manner in which political dons are landing in jail, one after the other. Figures like the notorious Shahabuddin of Siwan have finally been con-

victed, and there is now a strong buzz that JD(U) MP Prabhunath Singh may get a long jail term. The results are there for all to see. There has been a sharp drop in crimes like kidnapping for ransom in just two years. The CM himself says: "Please see the numbers of those who have been arrested under the Arms Act." One of the state's top police officials says Nitish believes it's possible to change the image of a state where every small goon walks around with gun-toting guards.

Can he, though? According to Krishna Deo Yadav, member of the CPI(ML) central committee: "Laloo destroyed the state while laughing loudly, Nitish is smiling gently and destroying the state." Neither, he argues, has addressed the crux of Bihar's problem—the redistribution of land. Nitish did set up a commission to look into land reform, but its report has been buried quietly. Any

development initiative, therefore, can at best bring about cosmetic changes. But then, politicians bringing about radical transformation is never the norm anywhere—and it might be unfair to judge Nitish against that. In Bihar, to even try and build a road or pick up a health system from a shambles can be seen as an achievement of sorts.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Nitish's opponents concede, albeit grudgingly, that he is currently on a good wicket and maintains a good image among all sections. Will it be cakewalk then for Nitish to trounce Laloo in the Lok Sabha polls next year? After all, the RJD, with 22 MPs, is one of the largest constituents of the UPA in Delhi. If Laloo ties up with Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP, he would have mopped up a chunk of the caste votes, making it difficult to counter merely with clean politics. But the RJD could well suffer losses. And, even as his opponents try to work out the caste math, Nitish himself is trying to rise above the electoral game and do the sort of things that have not, in the history of Bihar, reaped electoral dividends. He could well be rewriting the rules that have governed the fortunes of the state so far. □

with Inderjit Singh

HISTORICALLY, BIHAR HAS never been a functioning state, says an economist. "Nitish is trying to build one."

by Pragya Singh

WHILE an embattled government lashes out at 'cartels' as the root cause of spiralling inflation, the man in charge of tackling

them is busy interviewing potential employees. Vinod Dhall, acting chief of the Competition Commission of India (CCI)—the newly instituted authority against unfair trade practices—is caught in a strange, in-between zone. The commission he heads exists, but provisions to empower it are yet to be notified.

Besides, the commission has to fill a little over 420 posts. "Finding the right talent is a tough but critical task for us," says Dhall. The CCI has waited since 2003 for a formal nod to begin work. "I'm sure we'll be up and running by November or December," he says. No official deadline is in sight, however, and the ministry of corporate affairs, which has administrative charge over the commission, is cryptic: "No date has been fixed. We want the CCI to be set up at the earliest, it is expected to start within this year," says a senior ministry official.

Don't count on it though: all events leading up to the CCI's formal arrival suggest the government is still unsure, and India Inc suspicious. A tug of war has broken out as well between stakeholders—companies, other regulators and NGOs. Dissension stalks issues ranging from whether the panel should be set up at all, to specific regulations, particularly key sections that specify fines for violations, deadlines and, importantly, conditions under which companies will face tougher scrutiny. Under pressure—the PMO is monitoring its progress—the CCI seems to have launched a desperate bid to please everybody.

All is certainly not lost. For one, the commission has been upbeat since September '07, when amendments to the Competition Act 2002 were cleared. Then, there have been encouraging noises from other government wings: commerce minister Kamal Nath said last week that the CCI is "falling into place" while Planning Commission deputy chair-



Illustration by SANDEEP ADHWARYU

TANGLED FANGS

A body expected to crack down on cartels is being pulled apart even before its birth

irman Montek Singh Ahluwalia warned steel producers who do not lower prices would face the commission's scrutiny.

But till date, it is still the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) that is inquiring into the suspected cartels in steel and cement, for instance. Rather wistfully, CCI officials say these inquiries would have been right up its street. Once the CCI—whose mandate is tracking mergers and acquisitions (M&A) worldwide for their impact on Indian business and consumers and breaking down cartels and monopolies—is truly up and running, the

TOUGH COMPETITION

- No word on a deadline for notifications to kickstart the CCI
- Industry, NGOs and regulators oppose provisions mooted by the CCI
- In a bid to get started quickly, the CCI is reviewing and diluting new competition laws
- Expert committee to examine the final regulations. No deadline for this.
- Thanks to a talent crunch, the CCI is struggling to find qualified people.

MRTPC will be phased out in two years.

The debates over specific proposals of the CCI begin with a tussle over M&As. The CCI believes that for M&As of companies based in India, if the combined assets cross Rs 1,000 crore or turnover exceeds Rs 3,000 crore, examination for possible adverse impact on competition will be mandatory. For firms that are part of groups, the turnover threshold has been placed at Rs 12,000 crore, and the asset threshold at Rs 4,000 crore. And if the combined entity has an international ambit, the asset threshold is \$2 billion, while the turnover must be \$6 billion to invite mandatory notification.

"At this rate, there is a very high possibility that the commission will be overburdened with deals to evaluate," says Kartik Ganapathy, an M&A expert with the law firm Nishith Desai Associates. Ganapathy says it would be tough to find two infrastructure firms, for instance, which would combine to a smaller size than the proposed cutoffs. He believes India will be better off with sector-specific thresholds instead of the current one-size-fits-all approach.

"We are thinking of sector-specific thresholds," responds Dhall, "but that will be tough—just consider how many industries there are." The CCI argues that in the UK, a similar threshold for notification is half the Indian size, meaning that a larger number of companies have to inform the competition regulator before an M&A. And in the US, the threshold is three to four times lower, it says. For now, the CCI is thinking of setting up a helpdesk to assist companies with notification-related consultation.

In effect, while the commission contends it has already exempted a wide swathe of mergers, acquisitions and other "combinations" with the cutoffs, industry claims the laws are too sweeping and will cause delays. "India is not

"INDIA IS NOT READY for the CCI. It will deter foreign capital, create procedural hurdles," says advocate Harish Salve.

'Our job is to break down cartels'

Competition Commission of India's acting chairman and member Vinod Dhall spoke to Outlook. Excerpts:

There are wild swings in prices of essential commodities; both hoarding and price collusion are being alleged. Can the commission take action?

Yes, of course, but we are awaiting a full staff and to formally start operations. It should happen this November or December. Our job is to identify and break down cartels, if any, across sectors including essential commodities. Our role will help both industry and consumers.

Your interaction with sector regulators is unclear. Will that become a problem in future?

I don't think so. Competition issues are really quite different from what sector regulators do. Let's say you have a sec-

tor with a limited number of players. If three or four of them collude to fix prices, we can step in. For everything else, there is a sector regulator.

Many companies say they need more time, even 3-4 years, before competition laws are enforced...

Our task is to ensure that there is no anti-competitive agreement, that nobody abuses market dominance and to regulate M&As. It is a process that requires education of Indian companies as well, but the timing is right for a competition regulator in India. This is the

trend even in other developing economies around the world.

Hiring seems to be on at full steam at the commission. Are you finding the kind of staff you need?

It is a challenge and the schedule for hiring is very hectic. But this should work out in the next few months. ■



ready for a CCI with the kind of regulations that are proposed. It will deter foreign investments and create procedural hurdles," says noted Supreme Court advocate Harish Salve. On the other hand, after strong initial opposition to M&A norms, the US is now comfortable with a CCI that is open to discussions.

But there are other tricky questions. On acquisitions, the CCI's brief is to ensure against the rise of a monopoly; the draft regulations stipulate that any stake purchased in another firm would be subject to scrutiny. Industry is obviously against this. Faced with widespread opposition, the government is working on a cutoff stake to determine if an acquirer should be scrutinised.

Even a proposed time-frame of 210 days to determine anti-competitive behaviour has become a bone of contention. Industry says seven months is too long a wait, but consumer bodies say that's not

enough time. The CCI has clarified that the 210 days is the "maximum" time to clear any acquisition. Most cases will be cleared in 30 days, while simple clarifications will be dealt with within 60 days.

While the debate continues, an official in the corporate affairs ministry says all views need to be considered. "Competition regulators anywhere go through a similar process," he says. That's why, despite all the positive noises, the commission's regulations are still a draft. Even when final, an expert committee will examine them. With no official deadline, nobody knows how long it will take. "Like other bodies in India, the CCI will pick up steam through trial and error while on the job. It'll be a couple of years before things settle," adds Pradeep S. Mehta of Consumer Unity and Trust Society. Meanwhile, the CCI has to walk the tightrope between relaxing rules and the fear of being rendered meaningless. ■

by Arindam Mukherjee

SHE'S a little over three years old and can hardly put together a complete sentence, but Shivani already knows how to search for

pictures of her favourite cartoon characters in Power Rangers on the internet. She also paints, plays with numbers and learns words, thanks to the new computer-and-Internet access device Nova NetPC—developed by Chennai-based firm Novatium—which is the latest addition to other gadgets in her home in Chennai's KK Nagar. The price tag: just Rs 5,000, much lower than the Rs 25,000 one would pay for a conventional PC.

Meanwhile, in Delhi, a little gadget resembling a conventional laptop has recently surfaced in the market. HCL's Mileap is a small, ultra-portable laptop with a 7-inch LCD screen. It is priced at around Rs 19,000. Another version, priced at around Rs 29,000, is a mini tablet PC, complete with a swivel screen and a touch interface. Such affordable devices promise to bring the PC closer to the homes of millions of consumers on the wrong side of India's digital divide.

The response from consumers, however, has been muted. Across cities, they prefer the more expensive, "fully loaded" machines. For instance, Shivani's household, one of the early users of the Nova NetPC and part of the company's pilot project in Chennai, is yet to cross the conversion line. The family also has a conventional computer placed right next to the Novatium product. And in the parts of Delhi where the product was introduced in September last year, there has been, at best, a lukewarm acceptance of the concept.

The verdict is clear: Indian users are not ready to accept a product stripped of all features. They want everything in their machine, even at a higher price. Evidently, earlier attempts by companies at developing low-cost computers have not worked well in India. In 2005, HCL had launched a "PC for India", the first to break the Rs 10,000 price barrier. Launched with fanfare by then IT min-



Shivani learning with her PC at her Chennai home

PALE BLUE F

Indian users aren't warming up to low-cost comp

ister Dayanidhi Maran, this was the closest to being a full-feature computer for a mere Rs 9,990. The same year, Calcutta-based Xenitis Computers launched the My PC project at a lower Rs 9,790. Both initiatives have faded into the horizon. While HCL is now busy with its MiLeap offering, Xenitis has shifted focus to component manufacturing.

Sure, some companies also tried using cheaper Chinese components to break the price barrier, but there were few takers among India's quality-conscious computer users. Even for the few who were willing to accept it, the low volumes did not make business sense. Says Sameer Kochar, MD, Skoch Development Foundation: "There is a niche segment which wants the stunted prod-

ucts but there are not enough volumes for companies to push them for long."

Experts feel the poor response to low-priced products stems from people's aspiration to have feature-laden products even if they don't need it. Says IT and telecom expert Mahesh Uppal: "A low-cost PC is just short of what most people would need. People have aspirations regarding what they want from a PC. If you strip down that product, that aspiration is not fulfilled." Kochar agrees: "People always look at full functionality and you cannot fulfil aspirations in a stunted model. I don't know who they are targeting."

For instance, Novatium's NetPC has limited storage capability, and requires a constant and robust internet connection



SRIKANTH KOLARI



The HCL MiLeap laptop

COMPUTE FOR LESS: OPTIONS FOR ALL

1. Novatium NetPC

Price: Rs 4,900 for the box*

Does not have hard disk to store data. Storage is on the server to which it is connected. Requires constant net connection to work.

2. HCL MiLeap Laptop

Price: Rs 19,000** and Rs 29,900

Ultra portable but small screen restricts usage. Also not very cheap.

3. HCL Sub Rs. 10,000 PC

Price: Rs 9,990

Launched in 2005 as a fully-functional PC, price shot up when bundled with genuine software

4. Xenitis low-cost PCs

Price: Rs 9,790

Launched with fanfare as People's PC in 2005 but has not made much of a mark. Company now concentrating on component manufacturing.

*Monitor cost extra

**Linux based model available for Rs 13,990

RE

ers with limited features

to function—considering the state of India's connectivity in rural areas and Tier-II and Tier-III cities, this can be serious handicap. Then, HCL's MiLeap is limited by its screen size, which is a tad bigger than a smart phone.

Novatium CEO Alok Singh disagrees. "If a PC has to go to the millions, it has to get into the position of an appliance where users need not worry about software, virus or memory. They should be able to just switch it on and use it," he says. Ashok Jhunjunwala of IIT Madras—who has been working on a low-cost computer and was one of the brains behind Novatium's product—agrees: "We need to integrate the computer, the internet and applications to make PCs household devices rather

than just giving them to the people in a fragmented manner. And this needs to be done at an affordable price."

Most consumers agree that low-cost models indeed do not fulfil their aspirations for a complete product. Today, every buyer wants a DVD drive and good speakers in their PC. Says former Nasscom president Kiran Karnik: "The trade-off between performance and price has to be just right. The models that have come out so far have not quite achieved that. There is a tipping point in terms of consumer perception of value-for-money, as we have seen in mobile handsets and colour TV. The 'low-cost' PC is yet to hit that sweet spot."

Furthermore, aggressive pricing by existing players has belittled the low-

cost status of many of these products. The HCL MiLeap's Y series, for instance, is slightly more expensive than an average desktop. An assembled machine is even cheaper. With component costs falling, the price difference between the MiLeap and conventional laptops has thinned. Obviously, people are ready to go that extra step to get the real thing. The user also thinks of the total cost, which includes hardware, software, maintenance and connectivity. Taken as a whole, these are yet too high for large-scale penetration. The NetPC charges users Rs 399 a month for the service; the user also has to pay for the monitor.

It must be said here that the government has fallen short in its role to push affordable alternatives. Says Ajai Chowdhry, chairman and CEO, HCL Infosystems: "In India, increasing PC penetration on a mission mode never happened. The concept of connecting GDP with PC penetration is absent. The governments of Brazil, Korea and Singapore thought of that." Karnik adds: "Greater government involvement through funding of design/R&D is desirable. Project/funding for engineering and development of a sub-Rs 10,000 PC should be given to two-three companies or consortia, ideally academia, R&D institutions and companies." Clearly, that never happened.

What has happened though is a shift towards mobile phones, which are today performing most of the functions of computers. With feature-rich gadgets like the Blackberry and smart phones coming in, many computer applications like e-mail and surfing have shifted to the hand phone. Says Upal: "While phones would do most of the computer work, people with bigger needs would gradually access shared PCs. I myself am carrying my laptop much less these days."

And here lies a possible solution. According to official data, most of India's targeted internet users used the mobile phone as their access device in recent months. With applications and features going mobile, and with no problems of connectivity even in remote areas, mobile phones could provide the answer to India's much-needed low-cost computer. ■

FLIPPER ON A FI

WHO'S THAT AT NO. 10?



Team KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS City Support **STRONG**

SRK's magic has proven potent. Even with minimal local presence in the team, every member is a 'dada' in Calcutta—even Ricky Ponting. "Calcutta has always been quick to appropriate prominent figures," says sociologist Ranjit Mishra.



Team: KINGS XI PUNJAB City Support **Poor**

Organisers struggled to fill the stadium at the first game, when curiosity and expectations should have driven folks in. "There is not one Sikh in the team. If Bhajji had been there, it would have made all the difference," says social thinker Dr Pramod Kumar.



Team DELHI DAREDEVILS City Support **TEPID**

The media is hammering the Daredevils into public consciousness, but Delhi never had a sporting culture, or even regional loyalty. "The Delhi fan is an unevolved sporting beast," says writer/historian Mukul Kesavan, "to sex up the show, the organisers have forgotten that even in T20, loyalty is serious business."



Team CHENNAI SUPER KINGS City Support **TEPID**

Even Tamil superstar Vijay's presence hasn't helped fans identify with the team. Says art critic Sadanand Menon, "Chennai doesn't have a local hero as captain. Public bonding can happen...maybe through stunt images of Hayden snapping appalam between his fingers, Murali flipping a veshti or Dhoni grinding dosa batter, as he would the opposition."



AT TRACK



Team: BANGALORE ROYAL CHALLENGERS

City Support **TEPID**

The crowds came in, but the spirit was missing. Badri Seshadri, founder of cricinfo.com, summarised it best: "Loyalties are always built on firm values...and I am not still sure on what basis loyalties will be built in T20 cricket."

Team: MUMBAI INDIANS
City Support **TEPID**

First week, first show was a thriller. But the question remains: was it drama in the field or loyalty for their team that raised passions?

"People are not exactly clamouring for passes," says veteran journalist Kumar Ketkar. The team's not doing well...and where's Tendiyaa? If the groin strain takes time to heal, it could all just peter out.



Team: RAJASTHAN ROYALS

City Support **MEDIUM**

Strong crowd support for the team, but hard to tell right now whether they are lovers of the game. Says literary agent Mita Kapur, "It's the newness, the combination of more entertainment and less cricket that's taking time to sink in. Serious cricket fans find it too much of a tamasha." The lack of star quotient could also be their undoing.



The IPL teams find that fan loyalties are another ball game

by **Rohit Mahajan** in Delhi and Jaipur

ON a warm, otherwise desultory evening in Jaipur, merely hours before the world-altering Indian Premier League (IPL)

was to put up a spectacle at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium, a delicious irony played out in the choice of words made by a band of young men. Bearing the Indian tricolour, they shouted: "India jee-tega, India jeetega!" Hang on, we asked, shouldn't it be "Rajasthan Royals jee-tega"? "Well, India comes first," they replied with a touching spot of pop patriotism. At the other seven stops of the IPL gravy train, the scene hasn't been vastly different. Bangalore on April 18, the "D-Day" witnessed Brendon McCullum of the Kolkata Knight Riders bludgeoned his way to 158 on a flat track. The crowd did not know whether to sympathise with Mumbai man Zaheer Khan (who was playing for them) or enjoy the sixes hit by a Kiwi posing for 45 days as a "Kolkata dada". They simply cheered whenever it took their fancy.

It's easy to ascribe the buzz around the IPL centres to audiences passionate enough about their teams to buy expensive tickets. But in Delhi, a city of freeloaders, the paying public has been a tiny minority, as is the case in Mumbai. Mohali failed to fill the stadium. Ditto Hyderabad. So, does a poorly attended IPL match reflect an odd host city indifferent to its team's fate? Will stadiums witness a crush if organisers don't dole out passes? Will the eight city teams ever strike an emotional chord strong enough for people to go out, buy tickets repeatedly for IPL matches?

Sure, it's early days but one stark fact has already emerged: the IPL's first week has revealed a flaw that could prove fatal, an identity crisis that looks like it will need the last million dollars

of the marketing men to be resolved. There is so much money to be lost if the whole gamble fails that it's become a war to keep the fans hooked—India's own Opium War. As veteran Mumbai journalist Kumar Ketkar told *Outlook*, "There's so much hype in the press and electronic media, it's like they're trying to push a drug addiction...."

It's a peculiar situation—we have witnessed packed houses, as in Calcutta, but the crowds are not necessarily there for the cricket. They've been seduced by the lights, the firecrackers, the dancing girls (who, predictably, get called "easy" and "sluts"). It's a party in which the cricket has become incidental, where even the media has bought into the glam. "Newspapers are acting like PR agents, filling 3-4 pages with this trivial form of the game. This is when reporters admit privately that this is no cricket," says a senior editor with a Chennai newspaper. "Their writings gush about the cricket as if they've just witnessed a World Cup thriller. There's a strong deviation in what they say about it all in private and what they write."

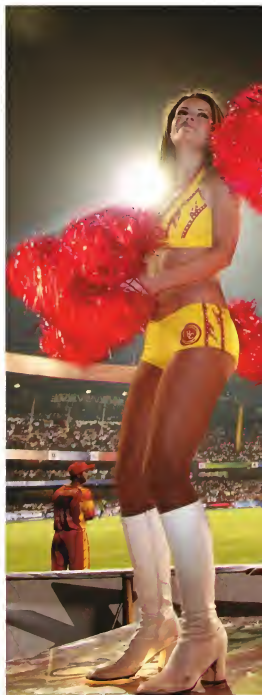
And what of the cult of celebrity? People will come in to watch Tendulkar or Dhoni, irrespective of whether they're playing for or against their team. So even the minuscule paying public cannot be assumed to be die-hard followers of one team. These initial trends underline the problems of building loyalties around city teams, each of which will spend around Rs 10 crore on marketing and entertainment. But identity is not a function of economics; loyalty can't be thrust on people who don't even know all the players they're supposedly rooting for. Forget the crowd, in last week's match against Chennai, at the post-toss interview, Mumbai's stand-in skipper Harbhajan Singh couldn't remember the names of two players in the playing XI. Is it any wonder then that the war symbolism, inherent in

the team names, looks absurd?

The atmosphere was electric in the Mumbai Indians game against the Bangalore Royal Challengers, but Ketkar believes it's not due to any sense of allegiance. "I don't think there's any interest in the team in the city," he says. "Seventy per cent of the stadium was full because of corporate handouts." The litmus test to judge the demand is the requests for passes. "Earlier, I used to request people for passes, for my son or daughter. People used to go to great lengths....," says Ketkar. "Now they (organisers) are begging me to take passes. When I say I want only two for my driver, they're surprised and want to give me another 12!"

Kings XI Punjab, based in Mohali, is turning out to be a cautionary tale and Sandeep Mehta of Wizcraft, who is building the team's identity in Chandigarh, admits the start has been disappointing. Barely 200 people were in the stands for

THERE WERE HARDLY 200 people around for the Mohali opener. Daler sang 'Panga na leh', the team anthem....



Good lookin' Washington Redskins do the pom-pom; Kareena looks good for Mumbai

the opening ceremony before their first game, where Daler Mehndi sang the team anthem, 'Panga na leh'. The bhanga and the dhols weren't much of a draw; neither was Preity Zinta, the team's co-owner. There was a trickle of people as the game went on, but it was a cup half-full, quite a downer at a time when T20 curiosity was at its peak.

Perhaps the team owners erred in mistaking Mohali for Punjab. The team's



hub—comprising the proximal tri-cities of Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula—considers itself distinct from Punjab or Haryana. “It would have been better if the team had focused on Chandigarh and not Punjab,” says Prof Bhupinder Brar of Punjab University. “There’s not much evidence of a Punjabi identity in the team.” Perhaps a sprinkling of Pakistani Punjabi players would have helped, feels Brar, explaining that a liberalised visa regime between the two nations has kindled a huge interest in youth here for all things Pakistani.

But it isn’t as simple, feels social thinker Dr Pramod Kumar. For the imprint of Punjab’s geographical position is deep in the mind of the Punjabi; the border state’s territorial identity surfaces every time two national teams play, most evident in an India-Pakistan game. There are other issues too—the club concept is alien here; a woman team owner, even if it’s a film star, only goes so far in what is a very strongly patriarchal society; and finally, a unanimous view in the region is that a local team without a turbaned Sikh just doesn’t get the hormones pump-

ping. (Yuvraj Singh is seen more as an urban Chandigarh kid.)

Anyway, even all of the above may not work. Indians, for all their parochialism, when they think cricket, think of India and not, say, Punjab. Cricket historian Ramachandra Guha says that “Indian cricket can never develop city-based loyalties because national identification is an intrinsic part of the game”. The IPL’s inaugural game, in fact, confused many and even repulsed some. R. Kannan, secretary of the Karnataka Tenpin Bowling Association, was one such who walked

SPIEL IS GOOD FOR YOU

JITENDER GUPTA

THE MNC DIET CHART

International commodity boards are doing local research to prove their products benefit Indians

- Like, California almonds for their property to reduce blood glucose levels
- US-grown pistachios slow down absorption of carbohydrates
- Soy acts as healthy protein source for vegetarians
- Chefs are roped in to make traditional dishes with imported food
- Critics say the drive is insidiously changing local food habits, and meant to only further exports to India

An SCS team promoting foreign products in India



And 'targeted' science helps you digest it. Thank MNC food lobbies.

by Debarshi Dasgupta

AS the battle to woo the affluent segment of the Indian food market heats up, international lobbies have begun to focus on funding nutritional research relevant to the Indian context. What started a few years ago as merely a promotional exercise has now become far more targeted. The aim is to yield 'proof' that certain food products are beneficial and healthy for consumers. Such groups, commonly referred to as commodity boards, include the Almond Board of California (ABC) and Paramount Farms Pistachios (PFF) from the US. In all, there are at least six leading boards promoting a host of food prod-

ucts ranging from soy to table grapes.

"We are looking at promoting almonds as a healthy snacking habit for diabetics in India given that they reduce blood glucose levels," says Karen Lapsley, director of scientific affairs for ABC, who was here last month to explore the possibility of India-specific research. The

scs group, a Gurgaon-based agri-business firm that represents PFF and a clutch of other American boards, is also firming up plans to research the possible capability of pistachios to slow the absorption of carbohydrates which helps in weight management. "We are open to more research if and when it's required," says Sumit Saran of scs.

The research is mainly carried out by individual doctors and, in some cases, at government institutes like G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology. Other lobbies such as the California Prune Board (CPB) and the American Soybean Association (ASA) have also recently carried out research in India, its

results being used as promotional material. The commodity boards are behind a shift whereby completely new food, like hazelnuts and prunes, have been introduced into the Indian diet. Fruits from the US—apples, pears, grapes etc—have become more visible, and new practices like using olive oil to make traditional recipes have been popularised.

Besides research, the campaign includes roping in prominent Indian chefs like Sanjeev Kapoor, who has promoted the use of olive oil for the International Olive Council, and Karen Anand, who has come up with Indian recipes like dried fruit pulao using prunes for the CPB and Hazelnut Chikki for the Turkish Hazelnut Promotion Group. Glossy handouts are also placed at point of purchase spots like supermarkets.

AND if one needed proof of how successful these groups have been, the figures say it all. In 2000, the import value of soy products from the US was just \$60,000, but by end-2007 that figure, thanks to the promotion by the ASA, went up to \$6 million. Similarly, apple imports from the US went up from 16 million kg in 2003-04 to 28 million kg in 2006-07 and grapes rose from 6.1 million kg in 2004-05 to 8.3 million kg in 2006-07. Import of almonds from California in '07 reached 33 million kg, a 35 per cent rise over '06.

It isn't just an onslaught of primary agricultural produce. Even products like oats are competing with indigenous alternatives such as dalia. Saran feels these products have come in because of the right market conditions. "First, there's a growth in the media sector—that's making people aware about such products and their benefits. Second, Indian families increasingly have the cash required to purchase them. And finally, the retail market here is developing rapidly, supporting such initiatives," he says.

While the US has pioneered this trend of pushing their products, they are by no means alone. Besides US entities, scs also represents the Turkish Hazelnut Promotion Group and the International

Olive Council. Even countries like France and Australia are looking at snatching a share of this lucrative market through their boards like Sopexa and Austrade respectively.

The influx of these goods comes at a time when some of the native varieties of fruits and vegetables are becoming scarce. This is something that worries food writer Nilanjana S. Roy, chief editor at Westland publications. "As a consumer and a glutton, I'm delighted we have access to a wider variety of products, but I worry when I see local fruits

and self-reliance". But Saran refutes such charges: "I'd say it is not a shift in the diet but an expansion. All what I'd advise is eat healthy. Eat Indian if available. If not, don't wait for it."

Kamala Krishnaswamy, a former director of the Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition, argues that such a "confused market" is an inevitable fallout of globalisation. "It's certain that nuts are better sources of healthy N3 fatty acids and that prunes are healthier than sugar-rich processed foods, but that doesn't mean we switch

APPLE IMPORTS from the US went up to 28 million kg in 2006-07 from 16 million kg in 2003-04. And, it isn't an onslaught of primary agri products alone.



like jamun, mulberries and phalsa being squeezed out," she says. And given the aggressive campaigning by the boards about the health benefits their products bring, Roy adds, consumers need to be more cautious today at the supermarkets. "If you have to choose between California grapes and a samosa, pick the former. But if it's between Indian grapes in season and grapes from California, pick the Indian ones. They're likely to have spent less time in cold storage, and should be better for you."

Some like Parshuram Ray, director of the Delhi-based Centre for Environment and Food Security, in fact argue that these groups are "part of a package that has undermined indigenous food habits

over totally. Take them in small proportions, diversify your diet. That's the best alternative," she says.

Lax quarantine and import regulations have also made it easier for foreign produce to come in. Notes S. Dave, director of India's Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority: "While it took India close to two decades to gain access to markets in the US and Japan because of extremely stringent import requirements, these groups have flooded our markets in just a few years." He doesn't moot a ban on imports, but feels India must have stringent quality checks on food and food products that come into the country. Now, that is nobody's point of dispute. ■

ALDO

WHY INDIA'S WELL-HEELED HEAD OUT FOR DUBAI...

- It's close to India, with several flights every day
- Its glitzy malls offer an array of experiences, from shopping for designer clothes and jewelled cellphones to skiing on indoor ski slopes
- Its swinging nightclubs attract the world's top DJs as well as glamorous women for hire
- Horse-racing, desert safaris, golf, gourmet restaurants, amazing luxury hotels are other attractions
- Booming real-estate sector has tempted many Indians to strike roots here

RADO

A person wearing a red shirt is captured in a dynamic pose, with one arm raised high, set against a dark background illuminated by vibrant red stage lights. The scene suggests a lively nightclub atmosphere.

Dubai is where India's jetset are heading to tee, trip and tipple

by Vinita Bharadwaj in Dubai

SAKSHI Didwania of Mumbai wonders how she could have resisted the temptations of Dubai for as long as she did. Most of her friends had been there multiple times, considering it's barely three hours' flying time from Mumbai or Delhi. So, a couple of months ago, 23-year-old Didwania did what her friends do—visit the Favourite New Destination of swinging, urban Indians. She stayed for five nights, and can't wait to return.

Abstinence, prohibited
Top international DJs
spin regularly at Dubai's
many night clubs



Picture perfect Indian faces are no unusual sight at events like the Cartier International Dubai Polo Challenge

When in Dubai, Didwania stayed in the tony Jumeirah district, waking up to stunning views of the Persian Gulf and the Burj Al Arab—the world's tallest hotel, where room rates start at \$3,000 a night and go up to \$50,000. Shaped like the sail of a dhow, the structure has a fibreglass atrium, a cantilever-held helipad (atop which Tiger Woods has teed off and Roger Federer and Andre Agassi have played tennis) and a Skyview Bar suspended 200 metres above sea level. Didwania recalls the Burj Al Arab as glorious both by day, and by night, when its fibreglass sail is bathed in colour-changing lights.

Away from Jumeirah, Didwania learnt to ski on the 400-

metres-long indoor ski slopes at the Mall of the Emirates, boasting a stupendous 2,23,000 square metres of retail space and housing 400-odd retail outlets, including the high-end Harvey Nichols and the high-street Zara. Back in Jumeirah is

the grandly opulent Madinat, a resort complex housing two boutique hotels, a shopping centre besides several eateries. Built like an ancient citadel, Madinat is dotted with elegant waterways. Malls in Dubai are open 12 hours daily during the week and longer on the weekends.

Dubai is a dream in the making, part of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's ambition to transform a once dusty

little trading port into one of the world's biggest financial and tourist hubs. Hence its glitzy new districts, luxury villas aplenty, giant-sized malls, elaborate marinas and the upcoming metro. The Indian 'in' crowd is bang in the middle of this pulsating, throbbing megapolis, thronging its nightclubs, shopping for designer brands, playing and partying all night long.

Why Dubai? The answer comes from Pradeep Hirani, at the local outlet of the Kimaya boutique, which stocks contemporary Indian fashion. A Mumbai resident, Hirani is known in Dubai as someone who knows the rich, the famous, and those who're both rich and famous.

Having brought many of his friends from Bollywood and beyond to Dubai, Hirani attributes the success of Dubai's "repeat factor" to "accessibility, accessibility, accessibility... it's close to India, and it offers everything that the London shopping and

"DUBAI OFFERS EVERYTHING THAT THE LONDON SHOPPING AND PARTYING SCENE OFFERS, WITHOUT THE DEPRESSING WEATHER."

metres-long indoor ski slopes at the Mall of the Emirates, boasting a stupendous 2,23,000 square metres of retail space and housing 400-odd retail outlets, including the high-end Harvey Nichols and the high-street Zara. Back in Jumeirah is



Celebspotting Sachin and wife Anjali at a charity event at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel in Dubai

partying scene offers, without the depressing weather”.

Shopping in Dubai is no longer about electronics and gold, though it is by no means extinct. Now the hunt is for

Ermenegildo Zegna suits and Gucci shoes. Or a custom-made diamond and ruby-encrusted cellphone at the dazzling new Dubai Gold and Diamond Park. Says long-time Dubai resident and art gallery owner Malini Gulrajani, “For Indian celebrities, Dubai offers luxury of a different kind—the convenience of jumping on a plane just for someone’s anniversary party or event, where they can let their hair down in relative privacy. And each time it’s a completely different experience in terms of ambience, decor, food, shopping. And with all that, Dubai also has the comfort level of a Mumbai or a Delhi.”

Getting wise to this Indian fascination with Dubai, airlines are starting new and more flights to Dubai. Earlier, even if Emirates Airline had four flights daily from Mumbai alone, it seemed to be fully booked all the time—especially on First and Business Class. This March, Jet Airways started flights to

Dubai from Indian cities, while low-cost carrier Air Arabia included New Delhi as its 11th destination on the subcontinent.

Though trade and cultural ties between Dubai and the subcontinent go back a couple of centuries and the Malayali had long made Dubai his home, it wasn’t until a cricket tournament began in neighbouring Sharjah that Dubai turned hot

“I FIND IT REMARKABLE THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST FIVE

EXCELLENT, FULLY GREEN GOLF COURSES OUT IN THE DESERT.”

spot. With Sharjah being “dry” or alcohol-free since 1985, it meant that Dubai hosted the numerous post-match parties. A spate of lavish NRI weddings in the early years of the millennium did their bit to draw the attention of moneyed Indians to Dubai. And then, of course, there were news reports of Amitabh Bachchan, Anil Ambani and other close friends spending new year’s eve in Dubai in 2003, further endorsing its appeal as a party destination. Now, it’s not just billionaire Top 10-listers Lakshmi Mittal, K.P. Singh and the Brothers Ambani who are regular visitors here, Dubai’s attractions are proving sufficient lure for the second rung of wealthy Indians as well.

And so hordes of halter-topped English-speaking women

PLEASE DON'T STOP THE MUSIC

Bollywood celebs, Indian DJs provide the glitz; sex, sleaze and drugs, the seamier underbelly

by Debarshi Dasgupta

MONEY is like water, Dubai's emir Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum once remarked. "If you lock it up, it becomes stagnant and foul-smelling, but if you let it flow, it stays fresh." Little wonder then that as its petroleum reserves dwindle, Dubai has executed a strategic turn to make commerce and tourism its principal income generators. This move has been largely successful—nearly 80 per cent of Dubai's population now comprises expatriates who have flocked to work there, and tourism initiatives keep government coffers well filled. The Dubai Shopping Festival alone, for example, earns profits of over \$1 billion a year.

Shopping in Dubai is, of course, a major draw for Indian glitterati who are regular visitors. But with an economy increasingly dependent on tourists and expats, there has to be more than shopping on offer to keep them coming back. So Dubai offers a nightlife that beats the best in the West, with hundreds of nightclubs, some of them featuring the world's top DJs and artistes. Apart from well-known international brands such as



Frequent flyer Mr and Mrs DJ Aqueel

Zinta, Katrina Kaif, Bipasha Basu, Celina Jaitley, Mandira Bedi, model Nina Manuel, art dealer Neville Tuli, cricketer Ravi Shastri, Shobhaa De, Pooja Bedi, Queenie Dhody and Dior brand ambassador Kalyani Chawla. Also frequent visitors are radio jockey Roshan Abbas, DJ Suketu and DJ Iggy, often summoned to liven up the party-clubbing scene. Says Suketu, who goes

a quick lesson before hitting the nightclub circuit).

Along with this glitz has come the sleaze, in a land where men outnumber women by 3 to 1. "The newest playground for the world's oldest profession" is how Dubai was recently described by the American Public Broadcasting Service. Sex workers from Central Asia find it a happy hunting ground, and Bluetooth technology is used to discreetly solicit sex at cafes and traffic jams. Drugs too have found their way into Dubai, which has become a transit point for drugs moving from nearby producers like Afghanistan to the lucrative markets of the West.

All this is fine, as long it's not in-your-face. Dubai's moral leash, under severe strain, has snapped on many occasions, though. Several Indian celebrities have been detained at Dubai on drug charges, among them designer Prasad Bidappa, actor Vijay Raaz, DJ Aqueel, restaurateur Farhan Azmi (son of SP leader Abu Asim Azmi), Bobby Chhabria (son of auto designer Dilip Chhabria), Harinder Singh, MD of ad agency Percept Holdings, and Shaan Sippy (grandson of G.P. Sippy). One of its most flamboyant

nightclubs, the Diamond Club, was shut down after it organised a well-publicised and equally well-attended gay night with a British transvestite DJ. And last year, when a Kuwaiti

ONE OF DUBAI'S MOST FLAMBOYANT NIGHT CLUBS SHUT DOWN

AFTER IT ORGANISED A GAY NIGHT WITH A TRANSVESTITE DJ.

the Buddha Bar, Dubai also has joints that cater to people of alternate sexualities, and even Indian strip clubs like Ashiana, which describes itself as a "Bengali nightclub".

The Page 3 circuit, both in Delhi and Mumbai, buzzes with talk of "guess who I ran into in Dubai last week". Regulars are said to include Preity

several times a year: "Each time I go, I find a new nightclub that's opened. There are lots of Indians at the clubs who appreciate Punjabi-Bollywood numbers, but also an amazing mix of people from all countries. And the world's top DJs." Another regular is Shiamak Davar who's opened a branch of his dance academy there (handy for

investor declared his plans to open a Dubai branch of Hooters, the US restaurant chain famous for its skimpy-clad waitresses, the Department of Economic Development put its foot down. Dubai, it declared piously, had no place for activities that violated its "religion, traditions and culture". At least, not those that do so publicly. ■

and their men now patronise bars such as the Dubai chapter of the Parisian Buddha Bar where a giant statue of a monk watches over the proceedings with unblinking eye and where a night out can cost upwards of \$1,000 for a group of five. Nilesh K., who works in Mumbai's financial sector, has visited Dubai nine times since 2006. By combining two weekdays with one weekend, Nilesh manages to shop, trip and tittle to his heart's content. On a recent visit, he rented a Porsche Boxster, let the top down and cruised along the main arterial highway—known as Sheikh Zayed Road—that is lined with skyscrapers of different shapes and heights, including the iconic Emirates Towers, designed to look like folded palms.

Nilesh lists the triple-level Trilogy nightclub as his favourite. Complete with daybeds and well-stocked bars, he says it was here that his dream of watching his international DJ gurus came true. Didwania concurs that the clubbing scene in Dubai is "fantastic! Much better than anywhere in India". Both Nilesh and Didwania admit to Ind-

KISHORE KUMAR



When's enough, enough The 2,23,000 sq m Mall of the Emirates

ian celebrity-spotting at such clubs.

Signature restaurants of three-star Michelin chefs (and of Asha Bhonsle) aside, eating out in Dubai can be straight out of a gourmet's fantasies. You are ferried in a traditional abra or boat through manmade canals to your table at the Madinat's Thai eatery, or transported in a simulated submarine to the Burj al Arab hotel's al-Mahara restaurant, where you can feast on caviar and lobster even as leopard sharks and moray eels swim past you in a giant floor-to-ceiling saltwater tank.

Fine wining and dining do not translate into bawdy public behaviour, though. Dubai has a zero-tolerance policy towards violators of its laws on drugs and drunken driving, and visitors are mindful that Dubai authorities clearly expect them to respect local laws. But unlike other destinations in the region, say visiting Indians, Dubai's live-and-let-live attitude is what makes it attractive. The singles scene is hectic—and draws Indians on the prowl to sections of Dubai where, shall we say, professional women from various nationalities gather. "Where there's money and glamour, dis-



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creet soliciting does take place," says Delhi-based businessman Sunit Mathur. "But in Dubai you don't see women out soliciting on the streets."

Mathur is in Dubai for a different reason. Dubai's golf courses are bringing in groups of businessmen from Delhi, possibly hankering for a glimpse of Tiger Woods, who spends considerable time here. An 18-hole game at Dubai's golf courses costs anywhere from \$100 upward, but Mathur can't seem to have enough. "I find it remarkable that there are at least five excellent fully green courses out in the desert," he says.

DUBAI HAS A ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY TOWARDS VIOLATORS OF ITS LAWS ON DRUGS AND DRUNKEN DRIVING.

The horse-racing circuit is another place for Indian celebrity spotting. Dubai's answer to Ascot and the world's richest horse race—the Dubai World Cup—is an annual event that takes place every March. It's the time and event when women wear hats, men dress smartly, there's no official betting and there's formidable socialising. Since the success of Mystical, bred by India's Zavary Poonawalla in the '07 racing season, Indian interest in Dubai's racing world has only heightened.

The more adventurous Indians, though, head out for a bit of offroading on the Dubai-Hatta Road. Lugging dune buggies, on designer sports bikes, wielding mean 4x4s—Mercedes G Series, Range Rovers, Toyota Land Cruisers, Nissan

Patrols, FJ Cruisers—they indulge in some serious dune-bashing, executing daredevil wheelies, tearing up the sands on deflated tyres, giving full vent to their adrenaline surges.

Finally, Indians are getting hooked to Dubai's burgeoning real estate market. With real estate prices escalating in Delhi and Mumbai, they are rushing to acquire freehold property in Dubai. While there are no official estimates of the number of Indians owning property here, all major developers say that Indians living in India make up a significant percentage of the buyers. They veer toward villas in communities styled like suburban America; they choose sea-facing apartments in Dubai Marina's skyscrapers and the flats in and around the Burj Dubai, now the tallest building in the world—almost twice as

tall as New York's Empire State Building. They even buy up properties that aren't quite completed, such as the Palm, a series of man-made, palm tree-shaped islands on the Persian Gulf. "A number of the houses

on the Palm were bought, sold and bought by Indians," says Harish Samtani, a real estate broker. Shahrkhan Khan was reported in the local media to have acquired one.

Other fantastic housing developments are planned—one shaped like a map of the world, another like the universe. "Many Indians from India have bought studios and one-bedroom pads—to rent," says Samtani. "But the trend now is that they're acquiring upmarket properties as their own holiday homes—definitely not for renting."

In other words—they're planning to keep coming to Dubai, for more shopping, racing, clubbing, partying. Exactly the way Dubai wants it. ■

PALMTOP HUTS, ANYONE?

Tax incentives, offers of resident visas make realty an attractive lure for Indians in Dubai

by Arindam Mukherjee

THE joke in Dubai these days goes something like this. Q: What's the national bird of Dubai? A: The crane. Dubai is a city perennially under construction, where a sea of skyscrapers surrounds the world's tallest building, and man-made islands shaped as continents beckon "exclusive" buyers. In this hush-hush world of real estate paradise, discretion overtakes all else: no names, please. Be it a marketing strategy, or sheer prudence, Dubai's realty market is the new El Dorado for India's well-heeled, who're buying residential and commercial space like it's going out of fashion. Next to London, it's the hottest realty destination for Indians.

Dubai realty watchers say that anyone worth their weight in Bollywood has houses here. There are no official numbers, of course. But the market estimates that, in 2007, Indians spent over Rs 4,000 crore in Dubai's concrete jungle. And that's despite a 20-25 per cent annual increase in property prices. Says Aditi Vijayakar, director, residential, Cushman & Wakefield, India: "The trend of Indian residents investing in property abroad is a recent one. We now hear that some purchasers have identified the pure investment potential of owning property in Dubai and invest in order to earn a favourable rental income."

The primary reason, say experts, is the tax incentive Dubai offers Indian buyers. As of now, there are no taxes on foreigners acquiring property in Dubai. To add to the investors' gains, income from rental and capital gains of immovable property in Dubai is not taxable in India. Also, in 2003, the Dubai government changed the laws enabling foreigners to buy freehold property on a 99-year lease, with a right to sell, lease or rent. Dubai developers have also aggressively offered incentives for property buyers, from discounts to holiday packages to cars.

To lure property buyers, the Dubai government has also int-



Seascape The Palm where local media reports Shahrukh has a villa

ans could invest abroad annually from \$1,00,000 to \$2,00,000 (Rs 80 lakh). The appreciating rupee made it even better.

Above all, despite its spiralling prices, property in Dubai is cheaper than buying a flat in, say, Delhi or Mumbai. Says Carl Vaz, director, India representative office, department of tourism & commerce marketing, government of Dubai: "A growing number of wealthy Indians has envisaged interest in owning holiday homes in Dubai as property rates are more attractive than investment in holidays homes within India." Adds Lal: "Land price at Dubai Marina is around Rs 18,000 per sq ft. Prices in similar Mumbai localities would easily be around Rs 60-70,000 per sq ft." You can get a 1,299 sq ft apartment in Dubai Ocean Front for around Rs 2.6 crore, but a similar unit in Mumbai would be priced in multiples of that amount.

Add to this a growing number of companies that buy property to provide accommodation for employees. Says Vaz: "Dubai has in recent years attracted significant investment from India into its free zones. Most companies invest in freehold property for senior staff and directors. So, projects like Dubai Marina, Emirates Hills and others have seen larger level of interest from Indian investors."

But most of all, a large number of buyers look at Dubai as an investment, thanks to the rising realty prices and the demand-supply mismatch. Led by top names like Nakheel and Emaar, about \$30 billion worth of construction is currently under way. For now, demand continues to outstrip supply. Prices too have been rising. But that hasn't stalled Dubai's new gold rush. ■

IN 2007, INDIANS SPENT OVER RS 4,000 CRORE IN DUBAI'S

CONCRETE JUNGLE, DESPITE A 20-25% RISE IN PROPERTY RATES.

roduced a system of granting resident visas to property owners. Says Sunder Lal, senior advisor, real estate, Sahara India Ltd: "You can get a resident visa if you own a property in Dubai as against the system of sponsor visas required to visit that country." In September 2007, another booster was added to this property buying spree when the RBI doubled the amount Indi-



Why Dubai Sucks

Blame its artifice, the rah-rah club, the demographics of colonialism

DECADES on, there is every possibility that Dubai will become a collection of cult objects. As things stand, it is merely the first capital of the Third World. And this is reason enough for us to consider the city beyond the terms of the tourist brochure.

Consider, for instance, Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas' vision of the "generic city". Like many of his ideas, this too is somewhat obtuse. By his account, the city of our present is finished. The generic city, our collective future, is nothing and everything, a contractible contraption exclusively populated by nomads and exiles and aeroplanes, where culture is history, even history is history, and which, "like a Hollywood studio lot", he explains, "can produce a new identity every Monday morning."

I'm familiar with the generic city; in fact I think I live in it. Or at least I would if I was to believe everything I read about Bangalore in the press. But like so many grand plans applied to grand cities, the details find a way to do their own confounding thing. Aside from Bangalore, only a handful of other cities today can claim the privilege of being researched with such hysterical intent, or reduced so frequently to some smug little homily of globalisation, and that is why I have sympathy for the idea of Dubai.

This is difficult to admit, since my own experience of the city has been awful. I travel occasionally to Johannesburg, and Emirates airlines is the easiest way to get around the Third World. Inadvertently thus, I am on intimate terms with Dubai airport and its environs. I have waded through its bathrooms (flooded by subcontinentals who have charmingly discovered that the bidet spray can double up as a shower), been offloaded and offhandedly dismissed by its racist airport staff and spent several zombie hours sliding off polyester sheets in biliously carpeted hotel rooms.

Then there is Dubai's rah-rah club. The cheerleaders themselves are a simple lot, content to shuffle about their beloved Tuscan fortresses in hermetically sealed compounds from Gurgaon and Powai to Whitefield and, of course, Dubai, where the art of the Tuscan fortress has reached its apotheosis. It is their scribes who are sinister.

The average lazy interpretation of Dubai is tagged with the sort of keywords that excite these people tremendously: "modernising Arabs", "glocalisation" and so on. The ensuing scholarship will take decades to undo, and however ignoble yet, is nothing compared to the lurking danger that Tom Friedman will decide to write a book about Dubai.

Having said this, I will confess a respect for indigenous Dubai design. If I had to choose between that and the global epidemic that goes by the name of minimalism, I'll take the electric palm tree any day.

What I would really like to understand is how a city that is roughly 60 per cent Indian (and 80 per cent South Asian) gets to be called an "Arab Emirate". Oh wait, this would be because the majority of that majority population have sub-human status in Dubai even after spending entire lifetimes there. The city is an artifice alright, but more for its caged,

shackled and imported underclass than its ersatz snow. If the situation sounds familiar, it is with good reason: these are the demographics of colonialism. The eerie thing about Dubai's imported colony is that it comes complete with a white overseer class, also imported of course.

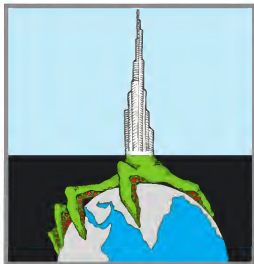
For the most part, it would seem like the Indian state is happy to count its remittances and not mind. To be fair, the entire West Asia has long served as a steady stopgap for residents of failed states not just in India but also Asia, Africa and beyond. And it isn't like Indian construction workers get treated any better in India; in fact, the only time our press

seems to notice them these days is when they're protesting mistreatment at foreign hands.

There is a way out of this mess. The tricks of the trade may be best gleaned from Europe, whose cities have had to renovate and reinvent through much of the 20th century, though with native emirati counting for less than 20 per cent of the UAE, something more imaginative is probably necessary.

Even as we speak, Rem Koolhaas is designing his grandest ever project—the 1.5 billion square foot Waterfront City on an artificial island extension of Dubai. With the generic city willed into existence, can the caring cosmopolis be far behind? ■

(Achal Prabhala is a writer and researcher in Bangalore)



SORT

WINDOW NEXT DOOR

Three Pakistani films come to India,
crossing over many kinds of boundaries

by Namrata Joshi

NOMI is fair, blue-eyed and handsome in his designer stubble. The engaging youngster plays pranks on village elders, flirts with his kohl-eyed sweetheart, Salma, and dreams of her prancing around in a sexy ghagra-choli with her dupatta blowing in the wind. The lovers sing mushy songs

(*Nomi nu Salma naal, Salma nu Nomi naal...Pyaar pyaar pyaar...*) in picturesque fields, their attire changing with every beat. Samir is the guy Salma has been betrothed to in childhood. He also sports a fashionable stubble but is a BSC fail, cigarette-smoking, disco-dancing wastrel. He has a bohemian, TV executive girlfriend, who swings her bare midriff better than Esha Deol in *Dhoom*, dances next to the pool in itsy-bitsy outfits and, much to Samir's irritation, gets pregnant soon thereafter.

Sounds like a frothy new flick coming soon to a multiplex near you? Only this isn't Bollywood; it's yet another Pakistani film, *Mohabbat Sachiyaan*, which hits Indian cinema halls next weekend. The differences from a masala Bollywood film are hard to tell, apart from the Punjabi lingo and the unfamiliar faces of the lead players. The lovers are mirror images of Raj and Simran in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge*. In *DDLJ* the

hero called the heroine *senorita*, while here it's the villain who calls her that. The eloping-on-the-bike scene is vintage *Bobby*, and the juxtaposition of rural innocence with degenerate, mechanised, urban relationships is a theme played out in many of our movies.

If Shehzad Rafique's *Mohabbat...* feels like the "traditional at heart but modern in looks" cinema of Yash Chopra and Karan Johar, his *Salakhen*, which ran for a smashing 75 weeks in Pakistan and got released here last week, is a blast from Bollywood's past—the rough and tough world of the '80s where the macho man, be it Big B or Mithun Chakrabarty, was a lumpen with a heart of gold. These films were about a constant battle with the unjust, stifling system.

No wonder the cinema exchange programme between the neighbours has been striking the right notes of understanding, identification and appreciation in India. We are the same people,



sharing a similar popular culture as well. "It's awesome to see how the divisions between us can get settled and resolved so quickly through cinema," says Joginder Mahajan, a distributor of *Salakhen* and *Mohabbat...*

Then why did it take so long for Indians to be able to watch a Pakistani film on the big screen? Even though India has never imposed a ban on import of films from any nation (save South Africa at the height of apartheid) no Pakistani film ever made it here, largely because of the perception that they were sub-



TRIBHUVAN TIWARI

Top, a scene from *Ramchand Pakistani*; *Khuda Kay Liye* at Delhi's Delite cinema; right, Zara Sheikh in *Salakhen*

standard. Saba Sumar's *Khamosh Pani* may have got shown selectively, but it was in fact a European co-production, made with South Asian talent.

It was Shoaib Mansoor's *Khuda Kay Liye* that changed things dramatically, earning new respectability for Pakistani cinema the world over. In India it got a standing ovation at the Goa Film Festival last November, enough to

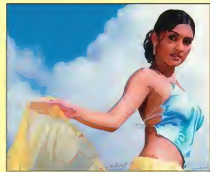
make Percept Pictures pick it up as the first indigenously produced Pakistani film to be released in India.

Khuda... reflects the changing spirit of Pakistani film industry: making socially conscious movies that question institutions and provoke debates but squarely within the narrative frame and story-telling conventions of mainstream cinema. "It's not some cheap imitation of Bollywood but reflects the renaissance in Lollywood," says film maker Mahesh Bhatt.

Another such modern Pakistani film is waiting in the wings: Mehreen Jabbar's *Ramchand Pakistani*, the first to focus on the minority Hindu community in Pakistan. It stars Nandita Das as the wife of a poor Pakistani peasant who accidentally crosses over to India. It is likely to be the first Pakistani film to get a simultaneous release in India. There's more to come: *Majajan*, an intense love story about a Nawab's son, played by superstar Shan, who falls for a courtesan.

"It's heartening to see posters of Bollywood and Lollywood juxtaposed against each other," says Bhatt. Some years ago Pakistani TV serials had become a rage on the video circuit. Then Bhatt himself made it almost de rigueur to use Pakistani singers in Hindi film songs. Pakistani artistes like Javed Sheikh and Meera have been working in Bollywood and Pakistani filmmakers have been regularly coming to India for post-production work. As a cherry on the cake last year Pakistan lifted the long-standing ban on Indian films as well.

This exchange might have created new markets for both the cinemas, but Lollywood has a long way to go to catch up with Bollywood. It makes just about 30 films a year against India's 1,000, with an average production cost of a mere Rs 2.5 crore. But the Pakistani industry is pleased. *Khuda...* got released in India with 63 prints, started slowly, but picked up and at last count had grossed Rs 3 crore. "There are more heads watching and more mouths talking by the day,"



"THE SUNNY DEOL KIND of films are not getting made any more. The Pakistani films will fill the gap," says a distributor.

says Ashok Ahuja, director, sales and acquisitions, Percept Pictures.

Salakhen released with 15 prints in the Delhi-UP circuit, did 30 per cent business in the first week and is still doing specially well in cinemas like Shiela in Delhi and in centres like Moradabad, Saharanpur and Malegaon, claims Inderjit Singh of Innovisions, the importers of the film. No wonder the real market for these films is being seen in the B/C grade centres, which are being ignored by Bollywood in its quest for urban and NRI audiences. "The Sunny Deol kind of films are not getting made any more; Pakistani films will fill that gap," says Mahajan. Pakistani filmmakers are specially aiming at Punjab. "Our cinema is primarily being made in Punjabi rather than Urdu and can have a ready audience in Punjab here," says Rashid Khawaja, CE, Cinetel Entertainment.

But business apart, Pakistani films would undoubtedly help create awareness and clear misperceptions about the country. "Through Bollywood movies there is lot of awareness in Pakistan about India. Here you might be thinking of us as regressive but our films will show you that we are a progressive nation and cities like Lahore are very modern," says Khawaja. That would indeed be the real gain for Pakistan. ■

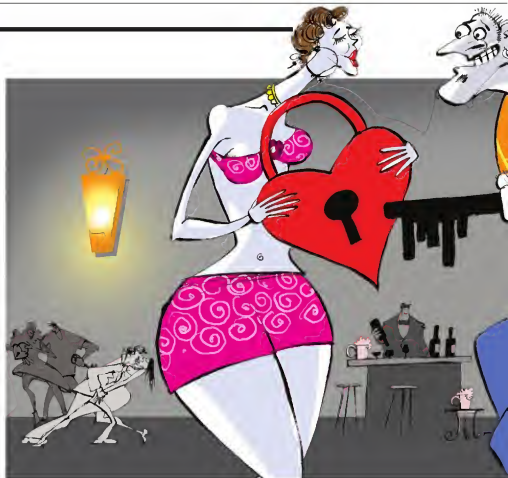
by Sanjay Suri in London

HE did not read the reluctance with which she raised the wrist, the one with the tiny padlock looped around the two blue bangles. Or her stand-back politeness; some chaps never do. She'd done her bit, looking only towards him, not at him, eyes in a wide-angle mode that declared erasure of this advancing object. The subtlety was wasted, he had the look of self-defeating determination men sometimes sport in the face of a woman they fancy.

He fumbled around with the key, angling it this way and that by her bangles, and as symbolism would have it, it did not fit. He tried a little longer than necessary to allow some accidental touching. She winced. "It's not fitting," he said, with an embarrassed cackle intended as laughter. She made a point of maintaining a look away, and that finally fenced him off. He should never have tried. It was another of those tragedies, wasn't it, that the guys smart enough to pick up a subtle message are probably the only ones you wouldn't want to give them to.

But she couldn't complain about the approach. For, this was the Infamous Padlock and Key Party, and guys were supposed to head for your padlock with their keys.

The padlocks and keys had been handed out at the entrance to the Sterling bar at the base of the Gherkin building, modern London's phallic thrust into its cold skies. Whether the Gherkin was for that reason suggestively chosen for the party was too tangential to say. But it's the place for about the newest way to meet for the single, and as they say, Asian. 'Asian' the Asian Speed D8 event certainly was, but not everyone is happy with that pigmental bracketing, because there were such a lot of obviously Pakistani chaps around so many obviously Indian girls. You live with this sort of thing if you get born into an NRI family and are the sort to get tempted by a D8



CHAABI KHO

The padlock is fitting—he's found his gal. Finally

promised on the web.

"There are about 250 singles here, we're absolutely full up," said Sonia, who was managing it all. There were evidently more women than men crowding around the bar area. And evident was their unwritten but somehow agreed dress code—high below, low above, and bottom-hugging etc in between. It was the evening to get all those months of working out to work for you. Make-up had been multiplied

into the heavy-paint jobs currently accepted as chic. The padlocks were a bit of interference, but most girls contrived to carry them like they were unusually placed pendants.

Three chaps who'd just come in collected their keys (each key can open more than one padlock) at the entrance, casually, as they might for a gym locker. By their side, a bunch of girls just in from the cold were picking up their padlocks. Odd, how to a singles party no one turns up alone. It might make singlehood too obvious. Single and approachable, fine; lonesome and looking it, no. Too weak to be attractive.

The three guys headed off to the bar, the bunch of girls to the sofa, each ignoring the other group for now. Predictably, the chaps ordered beer, standard fuel for temporary courage. The bar area had filled to disco-like density.

THREE CHAPS COME IN, take their keys. No one turns up alone. Single and approachable, fine; lonesome, looking it, no.



SANDEEP ADHWARYU

JAAYE

But doesn't the very act make him the wrong guy?

The light was dimmed to paint-friendlily wattage, the music was coming on solid. The atmosphere very key- and padlock-friendly.

That a key did not fit every padlock took its possessor from one woman to another, true enough to life games. It's the male thing to carry the key looking for a padlock, and what's a key for if not for insertion.... It could of course be a long way from the opening of padlocks on the wrist and the opening of any other, as a lot of the males seemed to be discovering. That is still not really an evening's job, and to that extent the second- and third-generation NRI girls were still Indian. Not necessarily virginal, but at least unhurried.

The approaches took some time coming. "I really feel for the guys," said one of the girls, perched above a lot of leg. "It must be really, really hard for them.

THE YOUNG LADY IN the blue-'n-white floral dress was talking to a chap holding his beer like he didn't need it....



It's ok for us to wait, but they have to make the moves." Gender demanded that it must be the key that seeks out the lock, on the face of it anyhow. A couple of chaps had made it up to her. And did they exchange telephone numbers? "Heavens, no." Then how would she follow up? "Who said anything about following up," her friend offered from behind.

The party had been announced until 3 am, and in time the seeking became more active, conversation more animated. One gender was finding another, and keys padlocks. The faces said talk was moving from polite to probing. The young lady in the blue and white floral dress (she was doing the theme of the young lady of old) was speaking enthusiastically to a chap holding his beer like he might not need it any more. It was working to an extent for

some, but perhaps not for most. A lone man still stuck to the bar was looking again and again at a group of girls a good deal younger than him, like he wished his parents had gone productively to bed much later.

A chap in studied casual stepped through to appear before the quite lovely girl in the black, what other women usually call, number. She was training to be a teacher, she said. And he had a job with a design company near Staines. And so they went on. It didn't really matter what got said; what does is who starts looking over the shoulder of the other first, and how soon. With so much to pick from you've got to shop around, the supermarket principle.

For the hosts, at £17.50 from each it wasn't a bad evening's business, not even after the bar and bouncers were paid for. But it needs to go on, and it does. There's a cousinly kind of D8 event every couple of weeks or so now, and Asian Speed D8 prepared for its fifth birthday party at the Gherkin Saturday April 26.

The business of course rests on enough people remaining single but hopeful. And passing the word round if only to complain, for others to try and retreat. There were some of those around. "I don't like it," said a girl all in red who had just retired to the sofa, padlock abandoned. "I just don't think this is the place where you can meet really nice guys."

It was a game where the men were at disadvantage from the start. Perhaps they had undone themselves simply by turning up. After all, what's a man without a context, what's a man without some reticence. And so the man who, key in hand, heads for a padlock on the woman's wrist as if that wasn't a silly thing to do is for that very reason the wrong guy.

But then, who cares. Coming from homes with traditional restrictions, young Asians step out with certain energy in search of the good life—which usually means an early boyfriend or girlfriend—and in the process discover the loneliness of living in the West. ■



PRINCESS FROM AYUDHYA

She's Thai royalty, and a scholar in Indic lore. Also, a keen student of things modern.

by Seema Sirohi

SHE is certainly not in the Princess Diana mould, nor in the jet-setting mode of European royalty who ski in the Alps and waltz down the Danube for pleasure. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand practises her Sanskrit, reads Pali scriptures and traipses around rural India looking at development projects to emulate for her people. And she goes to Tata Motors to check out the Nano. In her spare time, she writes poetry and children's books. She can discuss different versions of the Ramayana prevalent in Southeast Asia, play three instruments and speak four languages.

In an era when adulation of royals isn't automatic, Princess Maha Chakri, 53, has earned it in spades. A winner of the

● Thai princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, daughter of the Thai king, has won a formidable international reputation as a scholar, historian and development expert

- Her awards include the Magsaysay prize for public service and the Indira Gandhi prize for sustainable development

● A scholar of Sanskrit, Pali and Buddhism, she is fluent in four languages, an expert on the different versions of the Ramayana, and on India's historic links with Southeast Asia

- She has helped establish many academic and scientific ties between India and Thailand

◀ Closer ties Maha Chakri's interest straddles ancient and modern India

Magsaysay award for public service and the Indira Gandhi Prize for her work on sustainable development, she is an inveterate traveller, seeking and lea-

ring so she can teach her people. From the benefits of amla to the IT revolution, she is a sponge for all information that may benefit her country. (In fact, the Indian government gifted her amla saplings for the royal nursery.)

She is seen as the real successor to King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the world's longest-reigning monarch and known to be a devout, diligent ruler endowed with political acumen as well as moral authority. Princess Maha Chakri follows in his footsteps and far outshines her brother Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, who may be first in line of succession but whose reputation leaves a lot to be desired. Currently, his passion is flying planes to new airports around the world. Given their divergent personalities, it is no surprise that the Thai constitution was changed to allow for female accession to the throne. It is Princess Maha Chakri who will most likely accompany her father the king.

who is expected to visit India later this year. It would be his first foreign visit in 40 years, a decision surely influenced by his daughter's interest in India.

On a recent trip to India, a country the princess visits often, Maha Chakri spoke of the ancient ties binding Thailand and Southeast Asia to India. "Most scholars in Thailand study Pali, the language of the word of Buddha. My ancestors did it and my grandmother studied Pali and Sanskrit," she said. Dressed simply in a black skirt and jacket with not a hint of make-up, Maha Chakri said learning the Devanagari script was the toughest. Her teacher at university was Satyavrat Shastri, an Indian scholar who had gone to Thailand to teach Sanskrit. He has since returned and on her visits to India, the princess always makes it a point to meet him.

“He would talk a lot about philosophy and literature. When we talked, he would cite Sanskrit verses to illustrate his point. He could remember every-

TO HER, THE RAMAYANA is the story of revenge. “It’s tough to say who’s right and who’s wrong in battle. It’s the same today.”

thing," the princess recalled. Shastri studied the Thai version of the Ramayana and composed it in Sanskrit verse. Many episodes in the Thai version are different—a big demon abducts Ram and takes him to the nether world from which Hanuman rescues him. Ravana is an extremely important character, shown as wise and a victim of a certain unfairness by the gods. Ravana in his former life had served them but they inflicted pain upon him and he wanted to avenge his honour in the next life. "It is the story of revenge. It is difficult to say who is evil and who is right in battle. It is the same today," Maha Chakri noted. All Thai children grow up with the story of the Ramayana, and some episodes of the Mahabharata also are part of the Thai cultural milieu.

Her quiet but significant forays to India help rev up these old bonds that seemed so natural and organic once upon a time. It was in the first century

AD that Indian merchant princes from our eastern and southern shores reached what are today Thailand, Indonesia, Laos and Cambodia, carrying textiles and other goods. The locals adopted their culture, building vast temple cities bearing names and statues of Hindu gods. A fascination for Indian culture developed, and people closely followed and absorbed aspects they found interesting. It was a time when India was seen as a more affluent and powerful country, worthy of emulation. In those days, the Thai word for kingdom was 'suvarnabhumi', and the ancient capital of Thailand was called Ayudhya (its impressive remains still stand).

Elements of Hindu culture have survived in Thailand and other countries through festivals, royal religious practices, music and language. Royal Thai priests come to India to learn the rituals, and many Hindu deities can still be seen in Thai temples. The king himself is considered an avatar of Vishnu.

Besides the vast Hindu influence in the region, the mighty thread of Buddhism ties the two peoples together. Princess Maha Chakri's master's thesis was on the Tenfold Virtues of Theravada Buddhism which sent her to delve into the scriptures for research. She later discovered Sanskrit writings in Buddhist temples and translated them. Such is her devotion to the language, she organised a Sanskrit conference in 2005, attended by 400 scholars, including some from India. The University of Bangkok has a Sanskrit study centre.

But she is equally interested in the achievements of modern India. On every visit to India—and she has made nine since 1987—she tries to visit a significant technology centre or milk cooperative or a research foundation. “You have a very big country. And as India progresses, we are establishing more scientific and academic ties.” Just like the old times. ■

Bleached House Cat

An unsuccessful foray on breezy-absurd territory where anything goes. You can't even take the author to court.



THE WHITE TIGER

by Aravind Adiga

HarperCollins | 321 pages | Rs 395

by Manjula Padmanabhan

MUNNA Halwai alias Balram alias the eponymous White Tiger of this satirical first novel by Aravind Adiga is either a very funny fellow or a very annoying one. It all depends on how much you like a sassy anti-hero who murders his hateful **NRI** boss to claw his way out of the Darkness of India's impoverished millions into the Light of India's plump and wealthy hundreds. I found the book a tedious, unfunny slog, but the back-cover blurb says it is "compelling, angry and darkly humorous".

The tone of the writing is breezy-absurd, which means we can't hold the writer accountable for anything that happens in the book. Two-foot-long geckos and corpses whose toes send messages from beyond the pyre? No problem. After all, compared to the real-life absurdities of Indian life, where public buses routinely mow down pedestrians on the roads of the capital city and ordinary citizens murder their daughters-in-law on a daily basis, the events in the book are entirely commonplace.

The author's target is the cruelly insensitive landlord class, so we can relax in the knowledge that he's a Pureheart, battling for the downtrodden and the underprivileged. Too bad they won't be the ones reading or even buying this attractive-looking hardcover book! At nearly Rs

400, it is accessible only to that vile class which will no doubt enjoy recognising itself as the villain of the piece. That's just another part of the all-pervasive absurdity—attackers and defenders have no choice but to sit at the same table, snarling over which of them has the greater right to capitalise upon the suffering of the mute and toiling masses.

The book takes the form of a letter addressed to His Excellency Wen Jiabao, premier of China, during this dignitary's state visit to India. Balram has decided that the future "lies with the yellow man and the brown man now that our erstwhile master, the white-skinned man, has wasted himself through buggery, mobile phone usage, and drug abuse". Why does the protagonist choose the Chinese premier as the recipient of this letter? He tells us that it's because "Only three nations have never let themselves be ruled by foreigners: China, Afghanistan and Abyssinia. These are the only three nations I admire." This statement may seem at odds with the reference to the "erstwhile master" that occurs on the same page, but so what? There's no accountability in the breezy-absurd school of literature! Everything goes! Nothing is real! Lie back and open wide.

The letter, which extends the full length of the book, is written across seven days and nights during which time Balram sets down the story of his life, begin-

ning with his early struggles as the son of a halwai-turned-rickshawpuller in a rural backwater called Laxmangarh. Four bestial landlords oppress the villagers of this All-India-garh. Young Balram faces the routine humiliations of his class before beginning his evolution out of the primordial slime by becoming a driver. His employer Ashok happens to be the son of one of the Laxmangarh landlords. Ashok's wife is a trouser-wearing, badminton-playing superbitch by the name of—can you guess?—Pinky. Her dogs, Cuddles and Puddles, are white Pomeranians. The car is a Honda City. And the murder weapon, when it comes time for Balram to take the quantum-leap from slave-class to entrepreneur, is a broken whiskey bottle-neck.

Echoes of the Indo-Internationalist club of literature can be heard throughout. I discerned traces of Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan & Eddie* in the compassion for the underdog, I. Allan Sealy in the irony, Salman Rushdie in the surreal flourishes. But the composite result has none of the genius of these authors, neither the complexity of plot, nor the brilliant command of language, nor the depth of vision. Yes, the India Shining image that so many of us find nauseating in its dishonesty and complacency deserves to be reviled. But is this school-boyish sneering the best that we can do? Is it enough to paint an ugly picture and then suggest that the way out is to slit the oppressor's throat and become an oppressor oneself? Would the mute and toiling masses be grateful to be championed thus? I don't think so but then again, who am I? Just another Devil's spawn landlord-wannabe, right? So go on: read the book. You decide. ■

Echoes of Rushdie, Sealy and Nagarkar can be traced. But the final result has none of their luminous qualities.

East is the New West

Here comes the master narrative for the new world order



**THE NEW ASIAN
HEMISPHERE: The
Irresistible Shift of Global
Power to the East**
by Kishore Mahbubani

Public Affairs Books | 314 pages | Rs 695

by Arun Maira

KISHORE Mahbubani's book provides insights into forces shaping the world in the new millennium. That China and India, which together accounted for half the global economy three centuries ago, but declined to less than one fifth, may emerge once again, perhaps within fifty years, as two of the three largest economies in the world—the other being the US, the current economic superpower—is widely commented on. Mahbubani x-rays into seismic forces beneath the economists' view of global changes. Economic growth enables countries to manoeuvre power structures to suit their aims and protect their interests. Thus the West controls the organisations that determine the international rules of the game—in trade, international security, and conflict resolution. At an even deeper level, Mahbubani also focuses on the 'theories-in-use'—the mental models—about what is superior, and therefore what defines progress, that has been driving the changes in the world, including the West's hegemony over the East. It is at this level that he notices the first glimmers of change that will be most unsettling to the prevalent beliefs in the West.

Mahbubani points out that the global institutions imposed onto the world by the victors in the Second World War are, in practice, unfairly dominated by the West. "The great paradox of the 21st century is that this undemocratic world order is sustained by the world's most

democratic nation states, the Western states", he says. He is particularly scathing in his criticism of the US which has undermined the one institution that, according to him, provided the basis for a more fair global order—the UN General Assembly. It was supposed to be 'the parliament of man'. However, the UN Security Council, a blatantly unrepresentative organisation, dominated by the US along with its two Western allies—Britain and France—rules whenever action has to be taken. The irony is that the US, thereafter, criticises the widely representative General Assembly as a toothless organisation and does not even pay



Manmohan, Wen Jiabao in Beijing

its financial dues to it! The hypocrisy of the US, in projecting itself as the champion of democracy across the world, even justifying invasion of another country to impose democracy by force, receives a lot of Mahbubani's ire. Indeed, the US and Britain invaded Iraq ignoring even the Security Council, leave alone the General Assembly!

Even deeper than the domination of geopolitical institutions is the West's domination of theories of progress. "For centuries, the West has concocted many myths, the biggest myth it concocted being: the West is the true civilisation, while non-Westerners are sav-

ages," Mahbubani says. Along with the shift in the balance of economic power towards the East, particularly with the rise of China, there is a reassertion of the strength of Eastern civilisations. Mahbubani sees three major blocs contending for power—the US, the EU, and China. Examining them, he is most critical of the EU, which is holding on to visions of Europe's past glories beyond their 'sell-by' dates. The US must evolve, he says and hopes it will. China is greatly misunderstood by the West. But this does not mean that its views are wrong. In fact, as Mahbubani explains, the Chinese have a deep understanding of the meaning of human freedom and of basic human wants. What they are bringing about is a huge improvement in the condition of a mass of humanity in their own way, which may not appeal to Western liberals, but which, therefore, should not be judged to be wrong.

"Western minds need to drop all the ideological baggage they accumulated in the several eras of Western triumphalism, and they must stop believing that they can make the world in their own image. The West can no longer be Westernised", he says.

With the East reasserting itself and challenging the West's beliefs in its intellectual superiority, Mahbubani says India will become the bridge between East and West. "There is something unique about Indian political and social culture; a spirit of inclusiveness and tolerance...while the West often tries to discuss the world in black and white terms, the Indian mind is able to see the world in many different colors." When India's ability to reform and to develop strong democratic governance amidst diversity is being tested within its own boundaries, Mahbubani's book should inspire Indians to persevere. Because from India's evolution may appear the ideas the whole world needs. ■

(Arun Maira is author of Remaking India— One Country, One Destiny and Discordant Democrats: Five Steps to Consensus)

Bali Hells



**RIGHT OF PASSAGE:
TRAVELS FROM
BROOKLYN TO BALI**
by Rahul Jacob

Picador | 266 pages | Rs 250

by Raja Menon

WHY do we travel? Someone who has seen as much of the world as Rahul Jacob has, should know. Travellers once explored the unknown world. Now as Jacob says, one can view Shanghai or the Victoria falls in colour, magnified six times, at home on TV. The era of exploration for prestige and scientific knowledge has passed, when royalty or academia honoured those who walked to the source of the Nile or discovered remote regions inhabited by people thought to possess strange and violent ways. Jacob flew to many destinations—economy class—as the travel writer of the *Financial Times* for whom he supplied a witty record of places and an attempt, not always successful, to recreate the magic of certain destinations. This book is an anthology of those articles. Some places clearly have no magic, despite Jacob's best descriptive efforts. Dubai is one such—a dynamic real estate project with a pedestrian uncultured soul, striving for juvenile excitement by racing 4x4s up sand dunes.

But it is still apparently possible to discover, not geography, but music and atmosphere, cuisine and local hospitality, if, as Jacob has done, one reads extensively before buying an air ticket. He

The European sections of the book may convince, but the Asian traveller is unlikely to visit Lyon for a steak or Italy for ricotta.

includes what must be the finest list of travel books ever written. Listed also is some great literature which capture atmosphere like no travel writing—Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, Vikram Seth's *Golden Gate*, Timothy Mo's *Renegade* and Micklethwaite's *A Future Perfect*. Books to read before going include Louise Koke's *Our Hotel in Bali*, Max Rodenbeck's *Biography of Cairo*, George Mason's *Companion Guide to Rome*, Ibn Batuta's *Travels*—to hear how Batuta brutalised the islanders—and *Vade Mecum*, a Baedeker for Calcutta in 1810, depicting how 'the attachment of many European gentlemen to their native mistresses is not to be described'. Some cities leave readers unconvinced of the merits of a visit—Dubai, Bangalore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, for instance.

The locations where Jacob captures magic are Rome and Cairo, but above all, Sante Fe and its breathtaking opera. Jacob's favourite venue is undoubtedly Manhattan, but most of us, bombarded by the stunning expertise of movie cameramen, know it all too well. India naturally comes in for special attention through descriptions of Delhi, Goa, Bangalore, Indore and a tiger reserve. Indians, who can ruin any tourist's stay in India, are only gently criticised as having developed their anarchy and paranoia from 'decades of scarcity brought on by socialist rule'.

The book has both Asian and non-Asian sections. The European portions may sound convincing to UK readers but the Asian traveller is unlikely to go to Lyon for a great steak, or to Italy for the best ricotta, when, as the author says, Notting Hill in London serves the best European food. Perhaps the best portion is the interviews with several authors, as well as a great rediscovery of the Empire by both the former rulers and the ruled. Some interesting gems illuminate the text like Ochterlony, known in history for defeating the Gurkhas of Nepal, worrying over the fate of his illegitimate daughters from an Indian mistress. More than being a mere travelogue, this is a very readable book capable of inciting the innocent reader to wanderlust. ■

BIBLIOFILE

French Separation

WHATEVER his official biography may have done or not done for V.S. Naipaul's literary image, it has certainly thrust his biographer Patrick French into the Big Boys' League. As a first step, French has deserted his agent for many years, David Godwin, and moved over to Wylie ("the Jackal") Agency. It was French, incidentally, who tipped Godwin off on then unknown Arundhati Roy's MS. But now French feels Godwin's agency is too small for his needs. The New York-based Andrew Wylie, on the other hand, recently received a five out of five "shark rating" by a UK paper for his ability to poach authors and make a killing.



The Bhutto Crypts

THE best thing that happened to David Godwin at the Jaipur litfest was his meeting with Benazir's niece Fatima Bhutto. She met him again last week in London on her way back from Cuba, when Godwin signed her on for her proposed memoir of the Bhutto family. Interest in the book was so huge at the London Book Fair that Godwin received at least four offers from Indian publishers. But he wasn't in a hurry to sell at the fair. Instead, he is waiting to strike a deal with a UK publisher before he sells the rights here next week.



Soul Schezwan

INDIA and China seem to be battling for world supremacy not just in economy but in bagging those big, fat advances at the London Book Fair. Macmillan has just paid a whopping £100,000 for a Chinese bestseller, Yu Dan's *Thinking of the Analects of Confucius*, which despite its unpromising title was billed as the Chinese *Chicken Soup for the Soul*.

Illustrations by SORIT

CULTURE CULTURE

Alina Kabaeva



WHO Russian gymnast

WHAT Considered too heavy and ugly to succeed by her early coaches, Alina went on to become one of the most successful Russian gymnasts ever, crowning her career with a gold in the 2004 Olympics. She has also been a model, starred in a music video and, since last year, a member of the Russian Parliament.

WHY A Russian tabloid declared that the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, taking a leaf out of Nicolas Sarkozy's book, was divorcing his wife to marry Alina, who, at 24, is less than half his age. Putin's outraged denials resulted in the *Moskovsky Korrespondent* being forced to shut down.

HOW TO

Control A Bad Hair Day

Dry, lustreless hair seems an unavoidable consequence of rising summer temperatures. You can't control the weather, but you can minimise heat damage. If you must use a blow dryer, turn down the heat to the lowest setting. Make sure your hair is dry before stepping out—keeping it wet only makes it frizzier. Try and separate tangles with your fingers instead of a stiff hairbrush, and avoid crash diets!



MIND

Two girls are born to the same mother, on the same day, at the same time (that is, one right after the other), in the same month and year and yet they're not twins. How can this be?



The babies are two of a set of triplets.

A N S W E R



BAR BAR DECO

IF YOU CAN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF STORING YOUR Chardonnay in an ordinary wooden cabinet, Howard Miller has the perfect answer. The Niagara Bar cabinet has a rare Italian marble top, providing an elegant surface for serving drinks. It comes equipped with features like wine storage and a hanging stemware rack, a centre pullout shelf and insulated stainless steel bins for chilling wine and condiments. An ideal combination of style and functionality, it's cheap at Rs 1.5 lakh—as long as you have a villa large enough to accommodate it! ■



Kadambari Chauhan

Anti-Cancer Carnival

IF YOU'RE IN THE MOOD TO spend a fashionable afternoon with friends, and support a good cause while you're at it, pick up a ticket for Elle's Carnival for a Cause. Now in its fourth year, the carnival entices you to engage in the battle against breast cancer, which cruelly afflicts millions of Indians every year. There will be tarot-card readings, fashion photography, fortune telling, massages, and auctions. Remember that the little pink ribbon means that all the proceeds go to fight cancer. May 5, at Mumbai's Taj Mahal Hotel ■



Omair Ahmad

CALCUTTA RESTAURANT

Roll Model

UP Bihar, S.S. Hogg Street,
Behind New Market, Calcutta 700087
Meal for two: Rs 70

by Anvar Alikhan

WHICH IS THE best place for kathi kabab rolls in Calcutta? For 75 years there was only one answer: Nizam's. But, alas, after its trade union problems, Nizam's hasn't been the same. Meanwhile, challengers like Hot Kathi, Badshah, Kusum, Zeeshan and Bedouin have emerged,

each with its own loyalists. How the kathi roll was invented is a story as fascinating as the story of the hot dog or the ice-cream cone: one day in the 1920s the enterprising owner of Nizam's rolled his kababs into a crisp egg paratha, wrapped it neatly in tissue, secured it with a toothpick,



SHOMIK BANERJEE

and offered it to a finicky English customer. Thus a legend was born, and kathi rolls have arguably become Calcutta's second most famous delicacy (a distant second to maachher jhol, of course). After its reopening,



Nizam's has somehow lost its soul. Standards have slipped and its no-frills authenticity has been replaced by a decor like an Omar Khayyam nightmare. So, reluctantly, we've switched our allegiance to the nearby UP Bihar, run by ex-Nizam staff. It may be downmarket and grungy, but it's authentic. And the kathi rolls are super. ■

MUMBAI ART

State of Mind

LAXMAN AELAY displays his quiet yet powerful talent in his thoughtful and touching portraits of people in Telangana in this exhibition of his recent works, *The River Underneath*. The paintings, in oil and mixed media, have a recurrent theme of a river, with human figures emerging out of the background. Till May 1, India Fine Art, Tardeo



MUMBAI FILM

Return To Sander



Return To Sander

WATCH CINEMA AT ITS MOST THOUGHT-PROVOKING at the Goethe-Institut, Max Mueller Bhavan—a selection of films by renowned German author, director and activist Helke Sander. Known for their challenging and discomfiting themes, Sander's films have been at the cutting edge of feminist ideas since the '70s, and present her distinctive take on some of the big socio-political issues of our times. May 2-15, Max Mueller Bhavan



DELHI DANCE

Video Capers

JOIN THE KRI FOUNDATION as they celebrate the spirit of World Dance Day. Presented in collaboration with Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Cultural Council in India, DanLenz is a two-day festival of edgy video dance. A juxtaposition of the rhythms of the cinematic process with dance movements, it's a show you don't want to miss. Apr 27, 29, IHC



DELHI THEATRE

Little Folks

CATCH ISRAEL HOROVITZ'S *Line*, the longest running off-Broadway play, brought to life by the First City Theatre Foundation. The pettiness of the small, wasting battles with which we litter our lives is brought to the fore in this compelling drama, in which the panorama of human frailty comes explosively and hilariously to life on stage. May 3-4, India Habitat Centre



DELHI ART

Art Melange

MOOD INDIA-PART II GATHERS A GROUP SHOW of affordable works by 18 contemporary artists—much of it worth investing in! With a mix of both abstract and traditional, you can catch Debashish Mishra's cow in a jacket and other appealing vignettes of modern Indian culture. May 1-31, MEC Art Gallery



Amrish Kumar



Acclaimed fashion designer Ritu Kumar's son takes over the mantle from his mother

1 How is it being known as Ritu Kumar's son?
Quite useful for those who aren't good with names. Expectations are ever present.

2 How different are your design sensibilities?
More minimalist and shape-oriented. It leads to the occasional silence in the room.

3 Tell us about your debut at the WIFW.
It was a bit unnerving being spoken of as the presenter of the collection and sufficiently embarrassing to get on the ramp.

4 Where are you going to take the brand?
We're consciously developing forward-looking lines, launching a fragrance and focusing on handbags/accessories.

5 You must be the only designer with an MBA.
Aside from my training and experience in other industries, I'm a representative of today's aspirations which adds a lot to the brand.

6 Who are your major Indian competitors?
In the high-end market, there are other designers and specialised retailers. For LABEL, it's international brands (Mango etc), local designers and new local brands. The traditional casual market gets split into boutique retailers and the more mass market players.

7 Which are the new fashion republics?
With respect to opinion-makers, the world still gravitates to Paris and Milan. However, markets are noticeably shifting to Asia.

8 With more international brands, how do you foresee the fashion scene in India?
Indian brands will be battling to maintain ground. However, the indigenous heritage will leave room for our own brands.

9 So you're into music as well.
Yes, Mummy Daddy Records (as evident from the name) is a serious venture and we're launching compilation albums.

10 Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
Hopefully I'll still have hair and fit into my jeans.

Paromita Mukhopadhyay



ON the face of it, *Hope and a Little Sugar* is an earnest heart-warming film, one of the best from Tanuja Chandra. Yet, it doesn't seem to hold together. You watch it unwearingly but forget it as soon as the show is over; it's not affecting enough to linger on. The problem would be two-pronged. First is the timing;

Hope... hits the theatres a bit too late in the day. Chandra focuses on a disaster like 9/11, which has been minutely covered by the media, which has been well explored in cinema, even prompting Naseeruddin Shah to turn to direction. Such intense media scrutiny has its inexplicable and unfortunate effects—somehow the devastation doesn't seem to move and stir you profoundly any more.

Hope... doesn't add any searing, new emotional dimension to the tragedy. It should have been gritting and realistic but gets all simplistic and soft-focus. Ali Siddiqui (likeable Sial) is a struggling photographer getting philosophical lessons



Hope and a Little Sugar

Starring: Mahima Chaudhury, Anupam Kher, Suhasini Mulay, Amit Sial
Directed by Tanuja Chandra

★★★★ Must See ★★★ Good ★★ Watchable ★ Avoidable

on image-making from some random American who tells him his work lacks "intimacy" and "vulnerability". As if on cue, Ali gets mistaken for someone Sukhbir by a confectioner called Saloni Oberoi (a relaxed, over-smiling Chaudhury), who makes desi laddoos and calls them some silly French names. He falls moonily in love with her and attends her sardar family's dinner party where everyone thinks he's Sukhbir. How come? He also gets his heart broken on realising Saloni is blissfully wedded. Pronto, Ali's photographs become "vulnerable". Then 9/11 strikes and claims Saloni's husband. Unable to cope

with the grief, his mother (Mulay, quietly effective) begins talking to the photo of the son, father (on-the-edge Kher) believes the son isn't dead but only missing and Sikhs on the streets and pubs start getting mistaken for Arabs by angry Americans. 9/11 obliquely and discreetly. Yet, the biggest problem for me comes right at the start. Imagine the credits of a serious film beginning with a blatant sponsorship tag: "Sweetened by Sugar Free Natura". Commercial support is essential for the survival of independent cinema, but shouldn't we draw a line somewhere? ■

Namrata Joshi

HIGH FIVES

	HOLLYWOOD	HOLLYWOOD	MUSIC VIDEOS
1	Krazy 4	The Forbidden Kingdom	****:Live in Phoenix (Fall Out Boy)
2	U Me Aur Hum	Forgetting Sarah Marshall	Live in Las Vegas: A New Day (Celine Dion)
3	Race	Prom Night	Live from Philadelphia (John Legend)
4	Khuda Kay Liye	88 Minutes	How to...Megastar Live! (Blue Man Group)
5	One Two Three	Nim's Island	Farewell I Tour: Live from Melbourne (Eagles)

Courtesy: Film Information



Red Hot Chilly

OUR first citizen Pratibha Patil—in her trademark ghunghat and full-sleeve blouse—shed presidential protocol and embraced Michelle Bachelet, her Chilean counterpart. Both being maiden women leaders, compliments flew across palace walls. They also dwelt on issues like empowerment of the fairer sex. After the chilly response in Mexico and Brazil, Chile turned out to be piping hot.

Colour on the Wall

THE Louis Philippe Royal Challenger collection of off-the-field apparel was unveiled recently. Team members like David, Kallis, Zaheer and others shone on a different pitch in formal, semi-formal and evening wear. Mandira Bedi was there too, bombarding them with offbeat queries.



PTI

Generally Mushy

MUSHARRAF'S ratings may be in free-fall mode but Ms Pakistan World Mahleej Sarkari is going all mushy mushy. In a recent post on the pageant's website, she wrote, "Musharraf is a hunk. He has enough charisma to have young girls going nuts." Well, perhaps she's the only 'nut'.



FOTOCORP

Vanishing Act

TWO D-rate actors endorsing a publicity-driven break-up to promote a vanishing cream? Uggh! Arbaaz Khan and Malaika Arora may be richer by Rs 1.5 crore, but have earned the wrath of the press. Forget the product, the stigma is unlikely to vanish in a hurry.

Confucius Marg

DELHI heaved a collective sigh of relief after the Olympic torch run was over. It was hardly a run, just over two kilometers, but it brought the city to its knees. Much of south Delhi was at standstill that day. The public was not allowed anywhere near the torch. If you wanted to see how it looks, you had to switch on your television set. The traffic jam on the road to the airport lasted past midnight. Inevitably, passengers were stranded and flights delayed. Why couldn't the organisers take the torch from Rajpath to airport by helicopter? Unfortunately, the event went off peacefully. I was hoping for something dramatic but the Tibetans behaved like good refugees and did not embarrass their host country.

Was it worth it? Let me put it another way: When has China done anything for us? Somebody has to say this and it might as well be me: the India-China relationship has not been between equals since 1962. We live in the hope that if we are nice to them the Chinese will return our occupied territory. There is not a snowball's hope in hell of that happening. We also fear that China will walk in one day and grab Arunachal Pradesh. Would MEA have the nerve to summon the Chinese ambassador at two in the morning on a matter that could have waited until morning? I don't think so. Our woman in Beijing, Nirupama Rao, was subjected to that humiliation and there was not a word of protest from New Delhi.

The Tipping Point

If you live in Delhi, I suggest you look more closely at the bill next time you dine out. Recently a foreigner was overcharged by over two thousand rupees in a garden restaurant not far from the UN complex. Fortunately, his Indian guest took the trouble to scrutinise the bill and the restaurant quickly adjusted it. There were no apologies. Many upscale restaurants have started adding a 10 per cent "service charge" to the bill. This is the tip that you are now forced to pay regardless of the quality of the service. If you are inattentive, you will end up tipping twice since the waiter will not tell you that 10 per cent has been already added. If you are paying by credit card, the restaurant will cunningly leave space on the signing copy for you to add a second tip. How much of the tip goes to the staff and how much of it is pocketed by the owners will always remain a mystery to the paying customer. I



prefer the continental European system where the price on the menu includes the tip. You are not expected to leave anything unless you feel that the service has been extraordinary. There was a time when you left 15 per cent for the waiters in the United States. Now, it has crept closer to 20 per cent. It is the only country I know where the tip is considered income and waiters are taxed on it.

Mr Postman Rings At Once

I have yet to decide which postal service is worse, the one in Noida or the one in Gurgaon. Letters and packets aren't delivered or are delivered weeks after they are posted. I have learnt from experience that it is best to send everything to these border towns by courier service. You cannot depend on their post offices.

Delhi's postal service is entirely different; it is as good as any anywhere in the world. I can speak from experience since I have lived in a number of countries. The

staff in my local post office, Lodi Road, is always helpful and invariably courteous. If I have something urgent, the man behind the counter will take it to the backroom sorting office even if it has only a five-rupee stamp. Mostly, my local letters are delivered the next day. It is not often that one gets to say something nice about a government-run enterprise. The Indian postman is more reliable than the courier. He will put the mail in the box or under the door if no one is home. The courier, on the other hand, will take it back if there is no one to sign for it. And couriers ruin elegant invitation cards with their nasty staples.



Our Anni Mirabiles

I have always considered 1957 as the best year for Hindi cinema. That year gave us *Mother India*, *Pyaasa* and *Naya Daur*. But 2007 turned out to be even better. Look at the line-up. The year started with *Guru* and ended with *Taare Zameen Par* with *Chak De*, *Life in a Metro*, *Jab We Met* and *Om Shanti Om* in between. It was a bumper crop. Bollywood has finally got out of its Hollywood fixation. It has become more confident and no longer craves international recognition. Mainstream Bollywood doesn't care what the West thinks of Hindi cinema. Our films belong to a different genre. Unlike firangis, we like to cry in movie houses, women shamelessly and men discreetly. Women use hankies, we use the back of our hands. How else does one explain the amazing success of *Taare Zameen Par*?